



# OCEANIC DIPLOMACY

**Reasserting Indigenous pathways  
through the contemporary Pacific**

Salā George Carter • Gregory Fry • Gordon Leua Nanau  
EDITORS



# OCEANIC DIPLOMACY

Reasserting Indigenous pathways  
through the contemporary Pacific

*Salā George Carter • Gregory Fry • Gordon Leua Nanau*  
Editors

Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies Press  
University of Canterbury  
Aotearoa New Zealand  
2025

Oceanic diplomacy: Reasserting indigenous pathways through the contemporary Pacific is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0.

To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Published by and copyright ©

The Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies Press

University of Canterbury

Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand

All rights reserved.

Front cover art: *Connecting the dots* by Ulamila Bulamaibau

ISBN: 978-0-473-76938-3 (Paperback)

ISBN: 78-0-473-76937-6 (eBook/PDF)



**Macmillan Brown**  
Centre for Pacific Studies

*For Pio Manoa*  
(1940–2022)

Poet, scholar and teacher  
Wayfinder for a Pacific-centred humanities



# Contents

	Foreword	i
	<i>Afioga Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa</i>	
	Acknowledgments	v
	<i>Salā George Carter • Gregory Fry • Gordon Leua Nanau</i>	
	Connecting the dots: Artist's notes on the cover art	ix
	<i>Ulamila Bulamaibau</i>	
<b>1</b>	'Oceanic diplomacy' as concept and practice	1
	<i>Salā George Carter • Gregory Fry • Gordon Leua Nanau</i>	
<b>2</b>	Pre-colonial regional systems in Oceania	31
	<i>Paul D'Arcy</i>	
<b>3</b>	Diplomacy and the pursuit of peace in pre-Christian Fiji	53
	<i>Robert Nicole</i>	
<b>4</b>	Reconnecting the heartlands of Ocean-Pacifika through salutations: <i>Ai cavuti, fa'alupega, fakatāpū</i>	77
	<i>Ato'ese Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano • Paul D'Arcy</i>	
<b>5</b>	Giving one's word and giving one's paper: Hybrid diplomatic agreements between Indigenous Pacific states in the 19th century	99
	<i>Lorenz Gonschor</i>	
<b>6</b>	Aboriginal Australian diplomacy as Oceanic diplomacy	137
	<i>Morgan Brigg • Mary Graham</i>	
<b>7</b>	Popo and Supu diplomacy in the modern state of Solomon Islands	157
	<i>Gordon Leua Nanau</i>	

<b>8</b>	Malaitan traditional diplomacy in national politics <i>Tony Hiriasia</i>	181
<b>9</b>	Haus Krai: National symbol for grief, outcry, and a Melanesian space for diplomacy <i>Theresa Meki</i>	203
<b>10</b>	A Kanak way of being to the world: The appropriation of customary diplomatic protocols in new political contexts <i>Anthony Tutugoro</i>	223
<b>11</b>	Traditional diplomacy in the Mortlock Islands <i>Gonzaga Puas</i>	253
<b>12</b>	The Keamu Accord, <i>kastom</i> and maritime boundaries <i>Nic Maclellan</i>	277
<b>13</b>	Oceanic diplomacy: Learning from talanoa diplomacy <i>Jope Tarai</i>	311
<b>14</b>	'The steering paddle of our canoe': Culture in Vanuatu's diplomatic practice <i>Anna Naupa</i>	325
<b>15</b>	<i>Mā whero, mā pango ka oti te mahi:</i> The role of indigenous diplomacy in the success of the 1997 Burnham peace talks <i>Jayden Evett</i>	355
<b>16</b>	The evolution of the Samoan ifoga: From kinship ritual to diplomatic practice <i>Tuala Sau'i'a Louise Mataia Milo</i>	385
	Contributors	409

# Foreword

The Honourable Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa

*Prime Minister of Samoa (2021–2025)*

The story of diplomacy in the Pacific is often told through a narrow lens—one shaped by the rise of the modern nation-state and the formalities of Western practice since independence. Yet, as this volume so powerfully reveals, the art of persuasion or negotiation, reconciliation, and relationship-building has been woven into the life of Oceania for thousands of years. Long before colonial boundaries or international conventions, our islands, clans, and chiefly systems were navigating their own pathways of peace, alliance, and exchange across the vast Pacific Ocean.

While I followed my parents' footsteps into national politics and diplomacy, we were all students of the fa'a Samoa family/aiga, village and inter-village politics. We were taught to know and respect the Vā or sacred spaces among persons, nature, and cosmos. In challenging times, we often go back to our roots to find wisdom on how to navigate stormy seas. Samoans have weathered many storms, both literally and figuratively, and I am reminded of a common saying by orators of Samoa

– “*O ananafi e a’oa’o mai ai le lumanai*,” – Lessons of yesterday, inform the direction and decisions of tomorrow.

Though challenging events weaken our systems, livelihoods and environments, we have proven time and time again our resilience as small island countries. Our communal way of life enables and strengthens efforts to bounce back and rebuild – physically, spiritually and emotionally. This collectiveness puts the microscope on the importance of indigenous leadership and diplomacy. For me personally, in the community settings where I was raised, leadership and diplomacy were not announced—it was lived through the fa’aSamoa. These enduring traditions are not relics of the past; they are living systems of knowledge and practice that continue to guide us today.

The study of diplomacy in Oceania is undergoing a profound re-examination. For too long, the history of our region has been told through frameworks imported from outside—narratives that mark the beginning of diplomacy in the Pacific with decolonisation in the late 1960s, and that privilege the modern sovereign state as the only legitimate actor in international affairs. In this telling, the deep genealogies of exchange, negotiation, and peace-making that animated Oceanic societies across centuries are diminished to the status of “custom” or “ceremony,” their political and diplomatic significance overlooked.

The concept of Oceanic diplomacy, as set forth here, invites us to look again—to recognise the richness of indigenous traditional and local community practices of connection, and the cultural principles that have always underpinned the governance of relationships between our peoples. It is an approach that rejects both the dismissal of these traditions as mere “custom” and their superficial appropriation as cultural window-dressing. Instead, it asserts their rightful place as a vital source of wisdom for addressing the challenges of our contemporary Pacific—whether in resolving conflicts, negotiating maritime boundaries, or nurturing regional solidarity.

Diplomacy in the Pacific is often described as a recent development, measured against Western models of treaty negotiations, ambassadorial exchanges, and multilateral conferences. While these forms are undeniably part of our present, they are not the whole story. To think that diplomacy began only when the colonial state receded is to deny the wisdom and practice of our ancestors, who for centuries sustained peaceful relations, resolved disputes, and forged alliances across our sea of islands.

This conversation is not only academic; it is lived and deeply relevant to our present. This book restores balance to that narrative. It illuminates Oceanic diplomacy as both concept and practice—rooted in the political communities of Oceania and guided by principles that emerge from our cultures, genealogies, and relationship to the ocean itself. It reminds us that diplomacy is not only the formal work of states but also the enduring art of managing relationships between peoples. Whether through ritual exchange, feasting, kinship ties, or shared stewardship of land and sea, our ancestors charted pathways of connection that remain alive today.

For us in the Pacific, this recovery of knowledge is not only of scholarly importance. It is of urgent practical significance. We live in a time when our region is confronted by profound challenges: climate change, the protection of marine biodiversity, geopolitical competition, and the sustainable management of our resources. In addressing these issues, we must draw upon all the tools available to us. The principles of Oceanic diplomacy—respect, reciprocity, reconciliation, and solidarity—provide a compass for navigating both internal tensions and external pressures.

In Samoa's own journey, these principles have guided our foreign policy and diplomacy. In recent years, we have advanced negotiations on maritime boundaries with our neighbours, understanding that such agreements are not simply technical exercises but affirmations of relationship and responsibility. We have joined others in advocating

for the protection of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, recognising the ocean as both our shared identity and our shared obligation. We have insisted that the governance of the Pacific must remain with Pacific peoples, even as the region attracts the attention of larger powers. This vision, sometimes expressed as the *Blue Pacific*, is one of resilience, unity, and stewardship—a vision that resonates deeply with the traditions this book explores.

What is striking in the chapters that follow is the way they reveal both continuity and adaptation. Oceanic diplomacy is not a static inheritance; it is a living practice. It has been reshaped by colonial encounters, Christianity, and state formation, yet its core principles endure. These principles caution us against the superficial use of culture as window-dressing, reminding us instead to engage with respect for the custodians of knowledge and with fidelity to the underlying values that give these practices legitimacy.

This volume also contributes to the wider project of Pacific Studies by affirming that our own ways of knowing are central to our understanding of politics and international relations. It speaks to the decolonisation of knowledge as much as to the conduct of diplomacy. In doing so, it challenges us—as leaders, scholars, and citizens of Oceania—to recognise that the solutions to our present challenges may lie as much in the wisdom of our ancestors as in the institutions of the modern state.

It is therefore with a sense of gratitude and anticipation that I commend this book. It is an ongoing dialogue, a talanoa across generations and across islands—scholars, practitioners, and leaders all contributing to a richer picture of Pacific diplomacy. May it inspire us to walk with confidence along the pathways our forebears created, while also forging new ones that will carry our peoples safely into the future.

# Acknowledgements

This book was inspired by the observation that diplomacy, as taught in Pacific universities and foreign policy academies, is generally based on western concepts and institutions and continues to ignore the principles and practices of diplomacy which operated for hundreds of years between Pacific polities before colonisation. Not only does this ignore a rich and deep history of Oceanic diplomacy; it also seemed to us that it was ignoring the continuing relevance and potential value of these traditional diplomatic ideas and practices for contemporary interstate diplomacy in the Pacific regional diplomatic arena.

Our commitment to this project was also inspired by real world developments. In recent years Pacific leaders have begun to adopt these Oceanic/indigenous diplomatic ideas and practices to solve contemporary problems in Pacific international relations. We noted for example that Pacific Island leaders have successfully employed such practices in restoring relations between Pacific Island states, in negotiating boundaries between them, and in resolving armed conflict within them. Governments in New Zealand and Australia also began to commit themselves to developing Indigenous- influenced foreign policy and diplomacy. This new interest in reasserting Oceanic cultural diplomacy raises questions of how this might be done legitimately and in what contexts.

Our purpose in this introductory text is therefore to introduce the concept of Oceanic diplomacy and to draw out the lessons from its practice in contemporary context of Pacific regional relations. We are hopeful that this will give due recognition among practitioners to the continuing significance and relevance of Oceanic diplomacy and to the pathways it opens up for resolving diplomatic issues in the region. Our broader purpose is to contribute to the decolonising of knowledge in the field of Pacific Studies and, at the global level, to the post-colonial turn in Diplomatic Studies at the global level.

To examine these questions, we draw on the insights and research of a diverse group of scholars and practitioners from across the Oceanic region. We include contributors from the three big sub-regions of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, as well as from Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. The case studies provided by these scholars are very comprehensive and highly original in their insights. For many years, these authors have witnessed first-hand the significance and growth of local cultural practices and protocols incorporated into contemporary modern state diplomacy.

As a community of scholars, the project originated as a partnership between The Australian National University (ANU) and the University of the South Pacific (USP). It began as a *talanoa* (dialogue) in the Molikilagi Bure on the University of the South Pacific campus and became a monthly zoom *talanoa* during the COVID-19 period. It soon broadened to include scholars from the University of New Caledonia, University of Guam, National University of Samoa, University of Auckland and Christchurch University. The community of scholars grew in number and added new treasures to the project, expanding to include, for example, Aboriginal Australia. In May 2022, with the support of the Pacific Research Program at the ANU, the group held a workshop at Deuba in Fiji. The papers delivered at this workshop became the basis of the chapters in this collection.

In his concluding remarks at the Deuba workshop, the esteemed Fiji poet and academic, the late Pio Manoa, said that as he listened to the papers, he felt that a dream had come true for him. He was referring to a dream for the development of a Pacific humanities programme which he had put forward in a public lecture at the University of the South Pacific in 1993<sup>1</sup>. He felt that his plea for a Pacific studies where indigenous knowledge and practice was acknowledged, valued and taught, was being recognised in this project. He argued that such knowledge should form an important part of reinvigorating and reasserting the Pacific humanities. For the editors, Pio's assessment of the significance of the project was very re-assuring. The collection in this book is only part of continuing project, a growing body of work on Oceanic diplomacy. We hope this work empowers and transforms our learning in university classrooms, in the dialogues of politics, policy, philosophy and leadership – and inspires indigenous diplomatic studies in other parts of the world.

We would like to especially thank the hard working and highly professional copy editors, Vanessa Winter and Suzanne Fraser, for their meticulous work on the text and the respectful way in which they engaged with the contributors on a very difficult cultural and language terrain in these diverse case studies.

We would also like to express our appreciation to Distinguished Professor Steven Ratuva, Director of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, for offering the support of the Centre for the publication of the volume. In particular, we thank Robert Nicole as the managing editor at the Centre, and to the staff, Janus Nolasco for his work on the lay-out and cover, as well as Holly Neave, who provided administrative-logistical support. Our special thanks also to Ulamila Bulamaibau, a Fiji 'Blue Wave' artist, for her original painting for the book cover.

---

1 Manoa, Pio, 1993, 'Dreaming Humanities in the Next Decade', 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Lecture Series, University of the South Pacific, September 29<sup>th</sup>, Suva.

Finally, we are very grateful to the Pacific Research Fund at the Department of Pacific Affairs at the ANU for the generous support to this project. Their commitment to advancing research from the Pacific led by Pacific peoples, has been instrumental in the completion of this project by enabling the collaboration of authors from across Pacific universities, and the publication of this work.

Gregory Fry would like to especially acknowledge, with love, his life partner Annie Bartlett for her strong support through the early stages of this project, especially in the conceptualisation phase.

Gordon Leua Nanau would like to acknowledge the support of Associate Professor Sandra Tarte, Head of School of Law and Social Sciences (SOLASS) and support staff in the Government, Development and International Affairs programme at USP for their support on the project.

Salā George Carter would like to acknowledge and celebrate our community of scholars – our ‘aiga’ of visionary authors, contributors, special advisers and reviewers who have been part of all our talanoa tok stori gatherings, conference panels, workshops, in briefs, journals and classrooms on Oceanic diplomacy. We also pay tribute to our ‘tapuaiga’ all our families, friends and students – for being patient, praying, blessing and enduring inspiration for our authors and this project every step of the way now and into the future.

*Salā George Carter, Gregory Fry and Gordon Leua Nanau  
Canberra and Auckland  
November 2025*

# Connecting the dots:

## Artist's notes on the cover art

ULAMILA BULAMAIBAU



The intention is to have an effect such that the navigator, the traveler with his canoe, is projected off the cover, off the globe (the circle), in his quest or mission for ocean diplomacy on pathways wherever that will take him. I needed to be inclusive as well so the connectivity and the design needed to be representative of the various communities.

The blues for the oceans, the seas, the waters connecting us. It is powerful as a carrier for diplomacy past, present and the future. The boat or vessel or transporter in the shape of a canoe with a sail is steered by a navigator, an islander, a visitor, an inhabitant from place to place along the pathways, the journeys from the various lands. The lands are represented by the dots and the routes and the journeys connecting these lands are also represented by the dots. The varying sizes and shapes of the dots stand for the values, the differences, the richness in culture, and the exchanges in culture, in goods and languages and migratory values. From the top of the image, looking down at the design, it can be said that the canoe has a net, a fishing net and so forth represented by the sea of dots and lines connecting and spreading over the ocean, the seas.

*Ulamila is one of the leading members of the Blue Wave Artists Collective associated with the Oceania Centre at The University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji. Her work has been exhibited at the Oceania Centre, at Bergen University in Norway, and at Pataka Gallery and Museum in Porirua, New Zealand.*



# 1

## **‘Oceanic diplomacy’ as concept and practice**

SALĀ GEORGE CARTER • GREGORY FRY •  
GORDON LEUA NANAU

When practitioners and scholars think of Pacific diplomacy, they usually have in mind a form of diplomacy built on Western practices and protocols, and focused on the engagement between modern sovereign Pacific Island states and their accredited ambassadors. Seen through this lens, Pacific diplomacy is assumed to begin in the late 1960s with the beginning of decolonisation and the creation of the postcolonial state. What is overlooked in this conventional narrative is that prior to the emergence of Western-style diplomacy there were hundreds, even thousands, of years in which the political communities of Oceania practised diplomacy between themselves. In this book, we refer to these longstanding practices and principles as Oceanic diplomacy to emphasise that what we are seeking to bring into the light are forms of diplomatic knowledge, and forms of diplomatic practice, that spring from the history and cultures – and even from the winds and currents – of Oceania itself.

Although Westernisation of the region has added new layers of political community and diplomatic practice, it has not eliminated, or even marginalised, these traditional diplomatic systems and their ways of managing relations between political communities. Although unacknowledged, Oceanic diplomacy continues to play a crucial role in the contemporary Pacific, particularly in relation to conflict resolution, in the negotiation of maritime boundaries, and in creating Pacific regional solidarity. It also has enormous potential for contributing to solving the problems in contemporary regional diplomacy. We contend, however, that the incorporation of Oceanic diplomacy into modern state practice, while demonstrably and potentially valuable, requires care and respect for the fundamental principles underlying these longstanding practices.

The diplomatic practices and principles to which we are drawing attention have been in existence, albeit in shifting forms, for thousands of years, and they continue to be important, as we shall see, in the contemporary Pacific. The narrative we develop around Oceanic diplomacy is asserted against a dominant narrative that has not only undervalued the significance and value of these practices but denied their very existence as forms of diplomacy.

This denial has been encouraged by conventional conceptions of diplomacy as being a function of states. This conceptualisation has excluded other forms of political community, whose practices of engagement have been dismissed as 'custom', 'culture' or 'ceremony'. The dominant narrative has also been motivated by Western religious and racist convictions that framed pre-colonial history as primarily a time of war and 'darkness' only relieved by the coming of the light of the gospel and colonial administration. For example, as argued by Robert Nicole in this volume, the dominant interpretation of Fijian history taught in schools, which emphasised war and violence in pre-colonial Fiji, made it almost impossible to acknowledge the diplomacy and peacebuilding that was also a vital part of inter-polity relations in 19th century Fiji.

The central argument of this book is also an assertion against those who seemingly acknowledge traditional forms of diplomacy in the Pacific but who are interested in co-opting them in service of conventional diplomacy without due regard to their basic principles. We assert a view of Oceanic diplomacy that rejects those who would cynically co-opt, exploit or misrepresent these rich diplomatic traditions. To be clear, we are not asserting a pure, authentic Oceanic diplomacy against this exoticised alternative. Nor do we assume that traditional practices are unchanging. On the contrary, all contemporary manifestations of Oceanic diplomacy considered in this book represent a degree of hybridity in form, and adaptation to new contexts. However, we do assert the need for legitimate forms based on fundamental principles and consultation, as against the untethered use of cultural symbols as part of conventional state diplomacy.

We therefore chart a middle course between those who ignore and undervalue the historic significance and contemporary relevance of Oceanic diplomacy and those that enthusiastically and cynically promote cultural diplomacy with indigenous characteristics to provide window-dressing for conventional diplomatic goals and methods. In brief, our task is to assert the value and significance of Oceanic diplomacy as a valuable contributor to modern Pacific diplomacy, but only under circumstances where fundamental principles are not violated. One of the key contributions of this book is to explore, on the basis of case studies, what these circumstances are.

This introductory chapter considers three key questions that are the central concerns of the book. Firstly, what is the concept of Oceanic diplomacy? This includes how it relates to other concepts such as Pacific diplomacy and Indigenous diplomacy, its geographical scope and core ideas, and its relationship to the postcolonial turn in diplomatic studies. How does it contribute to this scholarly effort to redefine diplomacy in relation to the experience of political communities before and beyond the state?

Secondly, how does Oceanic diplomacy draw on, and contribute to, the field of Pacific studies? How does it build on previous anthropological and historical studies of connectedness between island communities, most prominently asserted by Epli Hau'ofa? Should we see it as part of the reclamation/decolonisation of knowledge project of Pacific studies? Should it be seen as contributing to the empowerment objective, claimed to be an essential part of some variants of Pacific studies?

Thirdly, we ask what is the relevance of Oceanic diplomacy to contemporary Pacific regional relations? Under what circumstances can Oceanic diplomacy be a valuable part of conventional Pacific diplomacy? When does such co-option become exploitative and illegitimate?

## **Oceanic diplomacy as concept**

To assist in clarifying what we mean by the concept of Oceanic diplomacy, it is a useful first step to compare it with the established concept of *Pacific diplomacy*. Pacific diplomacy connotes a particular view of who can participate in diplomacy, when it begins, and how it is conducted: it assumes that states are the only legitimate diplomatic actors, and that Pacific diplomacy is therefore something that begins in the postcolonial era with the emergence of sovereign states. The way that relations are managed between these states is assumed to follow universal/Western principles of diplomatic practice such as the presentation of diplomatic credentials, diplomatic immunity, treaty negotiation and multilateral conferencing.

## **Oceanic diplomacy vis-à-vis Pacific diplomacy**

Oceanic diplomacy, on the other hand, challenges the idea that diplomacy did not exist in the Pacific before the existence of the nation state; it introduces the historical and continuing importance of Pacific polities such as tribes, clans, chiefly systems and monarchies as diplomatic actors, and it focuses on non-Western diplomatic practices and principles that arise from the ancient cultures of the region.

However, we are not proposing that Oceanic diplomacy should displace the conventional state-centric understanding of contemporary diplomacy in the Pacific region, but rather that it should complement it. Oceanic diplomacy is sometimes entwined with state-centric Pacific diplomacy and its Western practices, but it brings different actors and different practices and principles to the table.

*Oceanic* is an appropriate regional label for our purposes because it is associated with a cultural framing of the region rather than the official political framing of the interstate regional institutions (for example, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Community), which tend to employ the term 'Pacific'. It also tends to denote societies and peoples rather than states (Hau'ofa, 1994, p. 153). 'Oceanic' denotes a broader transnational region rather than a state-centric region. Oceania is also a concept of region associated with anthropology, archaeology and geography rather than with disciplines that are premised on modern state borders and sovereign independence such as law, politics, economics and international relations.

The use of the term 'Oceania' also draws attention to the fact that the ocean, in which the Pacific Islands are located, is a vital part of the region and of pre-colonial regional diplomacy. The ancient Oceanic diplomatic systems were formed across vast ocean domains. The formation and maintenance of diplomatic systems were dependent on the currents and winds for ocean voyages that made links between particular polities more likely and recurrent, and the creation of diplomatic pathways more necessary (D'Arcy, 2006, pp. 70–97).

### **Oceanic diplomacy and Indigenous diplomacy**

A second important clarification of the meaning we are attributing to Oceanic diplomacy concerns its relationship to the established concept of Indigenous diplomacy. We regard Oceanic diplomacy as interchangeable with the concept of *indigenous* Pacific diplomacy, but only in the sense of the dictionary definition, as 'originating or occurring naturally in a

particular place', rather than the more specific United Nations usage that refers to groups who are minorities in their own lands dominated by a settler state.

We nevertheless prefer the term Oceanic to Indigenous in the context of this project, because outside of the settler states of Kanaky/New Caledonia, Australia, New Zealand and Hawai'i, 'indigenous' is not a term that is used by the inhabitants to describe their own cultures. Without a significant non-indigenous population, the indigenous label becomes less relevant, and even resented, in some independent Pacific countries, because of its political connotations as referring to marginalised groups in postcolonial settler states. For example, in her study of Taiwanese attempts to forge relations with Pacific states based on indigenous connection, Jess Marinaccio cites a Tuvalu informant as saying 'we are not indigenous, we're us' (Marinaccio, 2021). For Fiji, there is also a particular political meaning attached to the term 'indigenous' in a context where non-indigenes make up a large portion of the population, and this makes its use politically sensitive. To avoid any misunderstanding, we have therefore opted for 'Oceanic diplomacy' as the preferred label for the diplomatic practices we are describing. We nevertheless acknowledge the 'Indigenous diplomacy' literature as a natural home for this work within the diplomatic studies field and we recognise the similarity of the processes described as Indigenous diplomacy in Australia and New Zealand, for example. They have in common the acknowledgement of practices 'originating or occurring naturally in a particular place'.

### **What is Oceania?**

The question of where to draw the boundaries of Oceania, and why, forms a third important step in clarifying the concept of Oceanic diplomacy. As we are defining it, Oceania not only includes the island societies of the independent Pacific states of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia – the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati,

the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. It also embraces the Indigenous cultures of the settler states of New Zealand (Māori), Australia (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) and the United States (Hawaiians), as well as the Indigenous cultures of the remaining Pacific colonies of the United States (Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands, New Zealand (Tokelau), France (New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna) and Britain (the Pitcairn Islands). It also includes the West Papuan cultures of Indonesia (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: CULTURAL AREAS OF THE PACIFIC



Source: Fry (2019), CartoGIS, The Australian National University

Our inclusion of Indigenous Australia may need more explanation and justification. We argue that Australian Indigenous diplomacy fits in the Oceanic region for several reasons. Firstly, for much of its history Australia was physically part of the island region. It was joined to New Guinea, forming a landmass called Sahul. As Oceanic diplomacy is concerned with pre-historic connection in the Pacific, this connection

clearly qualifies Australia's Indigenous peoples for inclusion. Although separated by rising sea levels about 8,000 years ago, there has been a continuing connection – trading, war and diplomacy – between PNG and Australia via the Torres Strait.

Secondly, the Australian Government is attempting to incorporate Indigenous diplomatic values and practices into current Australian diplomacy. The experience of the neighbouring Pacific states in attempting to incorporate traditional values and practices into contemporary state diplomacy thus becomes relevant to understanding the pitfalls and strengths of such an attempt in Australia. And thirdly, as mentioned earlier, Australian Indigenous peoples have always been included in definitions of Oceania as used by anthropology, prehistory and geography.

### **‘Diplomacy’: The postcolonial turn**

Fourthly, it is important to emphasise that our concept of Oceanic diplomacy employs a meaning of diplomacy consistent with the postcolonial turn within the discipline of diplomatic studies. Geoffrey Wiseman and Paul Sharp state that ‘diplomacy is conventionally understood as the processes and institutions by which the interests and identities of sovereign states are represented to one another’ (Wiseman & Sharp, in Devetak, George & Percy, 2011). This dominant notion of diplomacy began in Europe as a description of the way in which European sovereign states managed their relations with each other after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. It later became the main organising concept of a global diplomatic system dominated by Western powers and populated by the postcolonial states they created; and the Western diplomatic principles and practices it enacted came to be seen as universal principles and practices. In this dominant narrative, diplomacy is seen as a social institution that provides the rules of engagement between states, and states are the only diplomatic actors. States are represented by ambassadors and governed in their diplomatic relations by the 1961

Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and other international legal instruments and conventions.

Most Western scholars of diplomacy have therefore not been able to easily ‘see’ cultural practices of engagement between other kinds of political communities, such as tribes, as constituting a diplomatic system equivalent to diplomacy between ‘civilised’ states. Rather, such organised networks of pre-colonial polities were more likely to be seen as falling within Western anthropological knowledge categories such as ‘exchange’, ‘custom’ or ‘ceremony’. To recognise the social practices we are exploring in this volume as ‘diplomacy’, we therefore embrace a broader definition of diplomacy, consistent with the recent postcolonial turn in diplomatic studies (Beier, 2016; de Costa in Beier, 2009; Grincheva & Kelley, 2019; Opondo, 2010; Spies, 2018).

This new wave of thinking in diplomatic studies sees diplomacy as a concept that should not be confined to the meaning attached to the Western practice of managing relations between sovereign states since the 17th century. As Marshall Beier, one of the leading scholars in this ‘postcolonial turn’, argues: ‘What many may be accustomed to thinking of as “diplomacy” [Western diplomacy] is actually a very narrow slice of human possibility in the interaction between political communities’ (Beier in Kerr & Sharp, 2016, p. 643).

Following this line of thinking, we define diplomacy more broadly to be the social institution existing between any political communities (sovereign states being just one kind of political community) that manages or governs interactions between those communities on such matters as trade, exchange, sacred events, access to resources, movement of people, conflict resolution, reconciliation and the conduct of war and its aftermath. Seen in this way, diplomacy is first and foremost a constructed culture that exists between political communities – a set of cultural rules and norms that shape or manage interactions between political communities. It is concerned with *how* the international

relations between communities is organised. It can be seen as the governance of the intertribal realm.

Unlike those who look to pre-state diplomacy for early forms of Western-style diplomacy (Neumann, 2018; Numelin, 1947), our approach, following Beier (2016), is to explore the alternative ways in which Oceanic societies have resolved the problem of how to manage relations between political communities, and how these practices remain relevant, important – even central – to how relations between political communities are managed in the Pacific in the postcolonial era.

Conventional Western notions of diplomacy assume that diplomacy is about the governing of relations between *sovereign* states. However, indigenous diplomacies and non-Western diplomatic systems tend to operate between political communities that have a degree of connectedness, particularly through kinship or shared cosmology (de Costa, 2009). As we see in the contributions to this project, such connectedness is a fundamental feature of Oceanic diplomacy.

It follows that Oceanic diplomacy takes us to a political site before, beyond, and inside, the state. It encompasses the various forms of pre-colonial diplomacy between tribes, clans, kingdoms and chiefly societies. It also encompasses diplomatic relations between clans and tribes within modern states, as well as their relations across modern state borders. Our guiding image of Oceania, past and present, is one of at least 1,500 political communities across what we now call Australia, New Zealand and the islands of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, with longstanding diplomatic relations that continue in the postcolonial period.

We do not dismiss the importance of the diplomacy conducted between sovereign Pacific states based on Western norms since the 1970s; rather, we seek to introduce a more complex picture based on an acknowledgement of the long pre-colonial history of diplomacy in Oceania, and its continuation despite the imposition of a new form of

political community – the modern state system – and a new Western form of diplomacy.

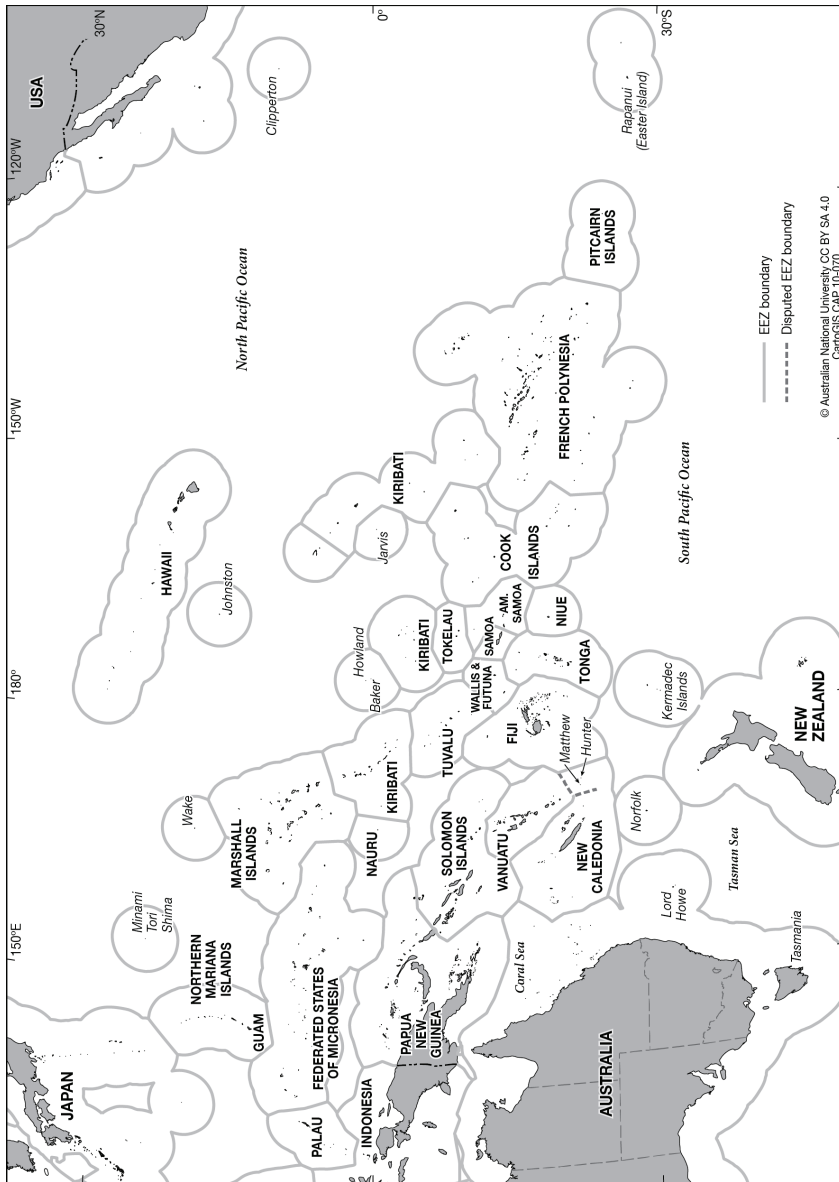
### **Re-imagining ‘political community’**

A fifth key step in conceptualising Oceanic diplomacy is therefore to re-imagine the dominant framing of ‘political community’ in the Pacific. In conventional scholarly and public approaches, political community in the Pacific is framed through a state-centric lens. Political authority is seen as residing in 14 sovereign or semi-sovereign island states (associated states) and 9 dependent territories with fixed territorial and sea boundaries (see Figure 2). This powerful framing is not surprising. States are, of course, the dominant form of political community recognised by the global community and backed by international law and the rules of membership of global and regional agencies. Moreover, they claim exclusive sovereignty over their citizens and territory. However, in a postcolonial region like the Pacific, the introduction of the state is a relatively recent development in the long history of these societies. For hundreds and even thousands of years there have been many other forms of political community in the Pacific Islands region – empires, chieftainships, tribes, clans and tributary systems. Furthermore, most of these political communities still exist and are important in the everyday life of most indigenous Pacific peoples across the Oceanic region.

The persistence of pre-colonial forms of political authority does not make the state irrelevant; the state sits alongside these traditional forms of political community as another important level of political authority, identity and governance. Therefore, when the contributors to this volume talk of cultural practices between tribes which are concerned with managing their relations, we argue that this is rightly to be seen as a significant form of ‘diplomacy’ in line with the postcolonial turn in diplomatic studies discussed above. And we argue that such traditional diplomacy can be just as vital and important for local people as diplomacy between states.

For example, a villager on the Guadalcanal north coast of Solomon Islands today would see the main authority as lying with their immediate

FIGURE 2: 200-MILE EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES OF THE PACIFIC<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Source: Fry (2019), CartoGIS, The Australian National University

clan, and at a higher level with the group of Lengo speakers, and only then with the provincial and national governments. As demonstrated by Gordon Nanau's chapter in this volume, the diplomacy that exists between these clans and tribes deal with the important things in people's lives – marriage, conflict resolution and harmony between tribes.

In his chapter, Robert Nicole speaks historically of the political communities of *yavusa* (clan) and *vanua* (confederation of clans) as being the actors in 19th century Fiji diplomacy. However, it is still the case that *yavusa* and *vanua* have a very important political role to play in Fijian lives, arguably even more than the state, and that therefore the management of relations between *vanua* and *yavusa* retains its importance. These practices have had to adapt to the use of money and to the impact of Christianity, but arguably the core principles and practices are still largely in place. This re-imagining of political community in the Pacific gives us the basis for talking about diplomacy as the management of relations between these communities for thousands of years rather than as a practice which emerges with the postcolonial state as in the conventional view of Pacific diplomacy. It also allows us to acknowledge the continuing management of relations between these traditional political communities as Oceanic diplomacy, even though they now occur within or across state boundaries.

### **Diplomatic culture**

Sixthly, we need to clarify what we mean by *diplomatic culture* and the related terms of *diplomatic system* and *diplomatic norms*. *Diplomatic culture* is right at the centre of the meaning we are giving to Oceanic diplomacy as a concept and practice. It refers to the agreed set of values (principles), norms (protocols) and practices, which together govern the management of the relationships within a diplomatic system. By *diplomatic system*, we mean a set of ongoing relationships between particular political communities in which the participants recognise continuous links between themselves and agree on a common way of managing their relationship.

*Diplomatic norms* refer to the cultural protocols governing diplomatic practices. They typically relate to such questions as which political communities can participate in the system and on what criteria? Who can speak on behalf of the participating communities? How are agreed protocols arrived at prior to diplomatic interaction? How is legitimacy accorded to the process? How are decisions made? Is the diplomatic culture built on egalitarian or hierarchical principles? Who is an emissary? Is there an emissary? How is conflict between the political communities resolved? How is restoration of balance achieved? What gender roles are there? What rituals are regarded as supporting the legitimacy of the connection between groups? What is the role for feasting? For dancing? For kava circles? For gifting?

### **Diplomatic pathway**

We introduce the *diplomatic pathway* as a particularly helpful notion in the Pacific context, because it references the connectivity of seemingly independent political communities, each with their own clear land and sea boundaries. Arising out of Pacific diplomatic ideas and practice, the diplomatic pathway is at the centre of our concept of Oceanic diplomacy. We are particularly influenced by Robert Nicole's chapter on pre-colonial Fiji in this volume, where he uses 'diplomatic pathway' to describe the established social connections between Fijian tribes and clans that facilitate the management of relations between them (he acknowledges that he derives this concept from Asesela Ravuvu's discussion of 'social pathways' between Fijian political communities in *The Fijian ethos* (1987)). Nicole points to particular clans and positions as having the authority and the knowledge to use these pathways. Used in this way, to incorporate the relationship, the rules governing who can travel the path, and the principles about how relations are conducted, this concept of diplomatic pathway may be equated with diplomatic culture. What it usefully emphasises is the centrality of social relationships and connectedness in Oceanic diplomacy between otherwise sovereign political entities.

We can also see the idea of the diplomatic pathway in Nic Maclellan's reference, in his chapter on the Keamu Accord in this volume, to the importance attached to custom pathways between tribes in the context of New Caledonia. He argues that, though disrupted by colonial dispossession, there is a strong tradition of custom *chemins* (pathways) in New Caledonia, across land and ocean, from Grande Terre to outlying islands and beyond. These pathways frame connections of alliance, reconciliation and ceremony.

Maclellan points out that in its 2014 Charter of the Kanak People, the Sénat coutumier (Kanak Customary Senate) lists these pathways as one of 18 fundamental elements of indigenous Kanak culture: 'the tool of communication used by the Clans or Chieftainships to send a message to other Clans and Chieftainships' (p. 17). The pathways also highlight the 'natural sovereignty Chieftainships and their Clans exert over their own traditional territory, delimited sometimes by the summits of mountains, rivers, sometimes by a rock, a sound, a reef or the sea horizon' (Sénat coutumier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2014, p. 30). We also see the idea of the diplomatic pathway in Anna Naupa's reference to the importance of '*kastom* roads' (social roads) between tribes and clans in Vanuatu. Finally, the diplomatic pathway also has resonance with the concept of the 'songline' of Aboriginal Australia.

The idea of the diplomatic pathway can usefully be generalised to all Oceanian diplomatic cultures, because it captures some important shared elements in these diplomatic cultures. There is a shared confidence that a social pathway can be found or made between groups – either because of ancient lore or kinship connections or through new pathways negotiated according to Oceanic diplomatic principles – and that this invisible social path has the solidity of a physical pathway, and that it is a link and a guide to maintaining relations. In *The people of the sea* (2006), Paul D'Arcy draws attention to the existence of named sea lanes between Micronesian islands. These sea lanes are not obvious to those without navigational knowledge; they are based on the reading of what appears

to be hidden – shoals, reefs, winds, currents, and stars. And yet, these named sea lanes have the solidity of roads or named lanes because they are seen as established in the knowledge of the navigators. D'Arcy argues they are like Aboriginal songlines, because they involve chants which reference unseen markers. This provides an apt analogy for a diplomacy not dependent on treaties or formal organisations, but rather on social relationships, and on how they are maintained and created.

The metaphor of physical solidity provided by the pathway should not be mistaken for assuming that such pathways must be unchanging or ancient. New pathways can be built and old ones remade. As important as an existing pathway, is the knowledge that new pathways can be built according to Oceanic diplomacy principles in new contexts of the modern nation and region in Oceania. The notion of the diplomatic pathway also takes us to a cosmological connection – a given pathway by the spirit creator; to a traditional connection based on kinship; and to a geographical pathway dictated by winds and currents.

## **Oceanic diplomacy and Pacific Studies**

Our identification and exploration of Oceanic diplomatic systems builds on the previous work of anthropologists, archaeologists and historians who have focused on Pacific exchange systems and other forms of intertribal connection such as inter-island voyaging. Most prominently, we think of Malinowski's analysis of the Kula trading ring in the eastern islands off the Papuan coast (Malinowski, 1922/2013). This longstanding exchange system had developed its own rules across diverse linguistic and ethnic groups to manage the diplomatic system including immunity for the designated individuals directly involved in the exchange.

Paul D'Arcy's work on Oceanic regional networks provides a very important foundation for our project. His concept of the 'regional network' is very close to what we mean by a diplomatic system, because

he includes political, economic and social aspects of the networks. He depicts three large and important regional networks across Micronesia and Central and Eastern Polynesia (D'Arcy, 2006; 2023), as well as a more localised system in Hawai'i which he examines with what we would call a more explicit diplomacy lens, as captured in the subtitle: 'balancing coercion and consent' (D'Arcy, 2018).

Key regional exchange networks, which would necessarily entail some form of diplomacy to manage ongoing relations, include that of:

- eastern Polynesia centred on Ra'iātea (D'Arcy, 2006; 2023)
- central Polynesia centred on Tonga and Samoa (Gunson, 1990; Petersen, 2000)
- the Micronesian sawei exchange system centred on Yap (D'Arcy, 2006, pp. 146–147; Petersen, 2000)
- the Kula trading ring in the Massim area of PNG made famous by Malinowski (1922/2013)
- the 'eight-isles world' centred on 'Are'are in Malaita (Moore, 2017, p. 55)
- the western Solomons network centred on Roviana (Aswani & Sheppard, 2003)
- the southern Vanuatu Tafea regional network (Spriggs & Wickler, 1989)
- the exchange and political network between the Hawaiian Islands (D'Arcy, 2018)
- the exchange systems in PNG Highlands (Kirch, 1991)
- the Hiri trading network along the Papuan coast and into Torres Strait and across the Coral Sea to northern Queensland (Kirch, 1991; Westaway, 2023)
- the regional networks within what we now call Fiji (as described by Robert Nicole in this volume)

- Aboriginal dreaming paths and trading routes across Australia (Kerwin, 2010).

Pre-colonial diplomatic systems could be quite small, comprising different neighbouring polities around one lagoon in an atoll, or neighbouring tribes in Highlands PNG, through to vast ocean spaces linked by named sea pathways over thousands of kilometres.

The existing studies tend to focus on these regional systems as exchange or trading networks. While the regional network concept describes exchange and connection, in this project we are focusing on these networks as diplomatic systems. We are therefore interested in the diplomatic culture that governs or manages habitual exchange or connection between political communities.

More broadly, we build on Epeli Hau'ofa's landmark effort to change the dominant framing of the Pacific away from disconnected 'small islands in the sea' to that of a connected 'sea of islands' (Hau'ofa, 1994). It is around this connectedness through exchange, trade, war, marriage and resource access that Oceanic diplomatic cultures emerged and are sustained. Hau'ofa gave examples of ancient connections between Rotuma, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Tokelau; between Yap and its tributary states across Micronesia; and between the kingdoms of Polynesia in Tahiti and Ra'iātea and Mo'orea; as well as exchange relationships between smaller communities within Melanesia.

What we seek to do here is to build on Hau'ofa's efforts to highlight 'connectedness' by focusing on the diplomatic cultures that surround these connections of exchange, and by expanding on their contemporary significance. The contributions in this volume take us beyond a region that was, and is, connected for transactional purposes to one that was, and is, connected through relationships and cultural practices – which we term Oceanic diplomacy.

## Oceanic diplomacy and Contemporary Regional Relations<sup>2</sup>

It is our strong contention that this study of Oceanic diplomacy also has important implications for the practice of international relations in the Pacific region. The recognition of ancient diplomatic traditions is not just of historic or scholarly interest. The various case studies in this volume demonstrate the significance of Oceanic diplomacy for contemporary problems of regional solidarity, peace and welfare. They have shown that Oceanic diplomacy can be a rich resource in solving contemporary interstate conflict as well as internal conflict.

The recent interest by Pacific countries in promoting indigenous values and practices in their foreign policy and diplomacy has made the central concerns of this book particularly pertinent. Since coming to power in May 2022, Australia's Labor government has made clear its intention to develop a First Nations approach to foreign policy. In Minister for Foreign Affairs Wong's words, the purpose is to deliver 'a First Nations foreign policy that weaves the voices and practices of the world's oldest continuing culture into the way we talk to the world' (National Press Club of Australia, 2022). This begs the question of what this might mean in practice. How would this be done? How does it go beyond the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's existing Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda of 2021, which emphasises indigenous participation, indigenous commercial interests, and the promotion of indigenous links and interests at global level (Australian Government, 2021)? Should it, for example, incorporate indigenous diplomatic values or practices? If so, how? The same kind of questions have been raised in relation to the New Zealand Government's declared commitment in 2021 to a Māori-inspired foreign policy drawing on key Māori cultural values of *manaaki* (kindness or the reciprocity of goodwill); *whanaunga* (our connectedness); *mahi tahi* and *kotahitanga* (collective benefits

---

2 A modified version of this section appears in Carter & Fry (2023).

and shared aspiration); and *aitiaki* (stewarding of our intergenerational wellbeing) (Evet, 2022).

Since 2019, we have also seen the Tuvalu government declare its commitment to the incorporation of cultural values in its foreign policy approach including through notions of *fale pili* (treating neighbours well), *avaa* (respect), *alofa* (looking after those who have no lands or cannot go fishing or farming), and *kaitasi* (sharing everything among family members) (Kitara, 2020). While Pacific Islands Forum Chair in 2020, Tuvalu succeeded in having these values embedded in significant regional strategy documents (Marinaccio, 2024, pp. 556–557). We have also seen Fiji deploy *talanoa* dialogue in global climate change negotiations while chair of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and seek forgiveness and restoration of relations with Kiribati in 2023 by using traditional apology and forgiveness ceremonies, thereby attempting to restore regional unity. We have also seen Vanuatu use traditional diplomacy in border negotiations with Solomon Islands, and Solomon Islands host a traditional ceremony of reconciliation for Fiji and Vanuatu in 2010 to restore broken diplomatic relations within the Melanesian Spearhead Group. These case studies will be examined in this volume.

Beyond explicit declarations of a commitment to the incorporation of indigenous values, indigenous diplomatic ideas and practices have been used by states in many contemporary situations in the Pacific. They therefore provide a reference point for thinking about when, and how, Indigenous diplomacy can be effectively deployed as part of modern state diplomacy. These ideas and practices have been drawn from thousands of years of experience with diplomacy between the various pre-colonial polities of Oceania – tribes, clans, chiefly systems and kingdoms. On some occasions, Indigenous diplomacy has been deployed very successfully, and at other times not.

Several prominent examples of the use of Oceanic diplomacy to deal with serious diplomatic rifts illustrate what is at stake. In his first

international visit as Fiji prime minister in January 2023, Prime Minister Rabuka made a presentation of the Fijian *boka* (deep apology) ceremony to President Maamau of Kiribati. This was an attempt by the new Fiji government, as chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, to apologise to Kiribati and thereby entice it back into the organisation. Kiribati had withdrawn the previous year along with other Micronesian states, but unlike the other Micronesian states, had not been part of the Suva Agreement that had persuaded the others to return. As explained to the I-Kiribati interlocuters by the Fijian presenter, the *boka* is an ‘affirmation of one’s commitment to kinship and solidarity ... in this ceremony Fiji is saying Kiribati we see you and we therefore recommit our obligation to you as an integral part of the Fijian family and our Pacific community’ (Office of the Prime Minister Fiji, 2023).

In responding to Fiji’s ceremonial apology, President Maamau is reported as saying that ‘Kiribati has truly felt the brotherly love that translates into the Pacific Way of acceptance, reconciliation, peace and unity’ (Komai, 2023). Prime Minister Rabuka commented that:

when we deviate and adopt other ways of thinking that are not regional, we tend to easily offend one another. But when we think alike, like the Pacific Way, it’s so easy to repair the damage that perhaps would lead us astray from the Forum ... and that is why I preferred to have the Fijian ceremonies of the *boka* and *sevusevu*. (Komai, 2023)

Kiribati subsequently rejoined the Pacific Islands Forum.

A second prominent example of the successful use of Oceanic diplomacy in the Pacific was the reconciliation ceremony organised by Solomon Islands to heal a serious rift between Vanuatu and Fiji in 2010, a division that threatened the unity of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). The source of the dispute was Vanuatu Prime Minister Natapei’s decision

to refuse to hand over the chairmanship of the MSG to Fiji because it had become a military regime. Solomon Islands hosted a traditional ceremony of apology and forgiveness, the form of which was negotiated between the ni-Vanuatu custom chiefs and Fijian chiefs. This ceremony resolved the tensions. The *Solomon Times* reported Solomon Islands Prime Minister Danny Philip as saying that the reconciliation ceremony is a testimony of the 'value, strength, and relevance of the Melanesian cultures and traditions including the role of chiefs in settling differences' ('Fiji handed MSG chairmanship', 2010). Further, he stated that 'it [the reconciliation ceremony] clearly shows that Melanesian countries do not need to go to the United Nations or international courts to solve our problems but solve them at our own soil [sic]' ('New era of MSG solidarity', 2010).

A third example is the highly successful deployment of Oceanic diplomacy at the Bougainville Peace talks at Burnham, New Zealand in 1997. In his chapter in this volume, Jay Evett argues that it was the use of Indigenous diplomacy that achieved the peace agreement where earlier Western-style talks had failed. The New Zealand host made the decision to conduct the peace talks using indigenous principles and practices. This included having emissaries from the participating parties agree on the way in which the talks would proceed, having a Solomon Islands minister respected by all sides as chair, allowing the time necessary to achieve agreement under Melanesian protocols, and legitimating the diplomatic meeting space with a traditional powhiri ceremony by the Māori landowners.

Evett argues that most important of all was the adoption of *trautim*, a Melanesian approach to conflict resolution. He explains that:

Trautim prioritised personal reconciliation between participants before negotiating the issues of the conflict. Relationship-building was the core aim of both Burnham talks. This prioritisation was a considerable change from

earlier talks, which attempted to reconcile parties after agreements had been negotiated.

He goes on to say that:

Trautim provided the talks with a method which was designed specifically to respond to the cultural principles and expectations of conflict settlement in Melanesia. As a practice of relationship management, its focus on resolving issues through the reconciliation of people proved what was needed to make substantive, sustainable progress in bringing about peace.

Finally, Oceanic diplomatic principles and practice have also been very effective in the negotiation of maritime boundaries between some Pacific states. Anna Naupa has shown how Indigenous diplomacy worked to achieve the successful negotiation of maritime boundaries between Vanuatu and Solomon Islands where Western-style diplomacy had failed (Naupa, 2022). After 30 years of failure to negotiate a maritime boundary treaty between Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the employment of indigenous cultural diplomacy based on the ancient ties between the Torba province of Vanuatu and the Temotu province of Solomon Islands delivered the signing of the Mota Lava Treaty in 2016. According to Vanuatu's head of negotiations, Sangavalu Tevi:

The UNCLOS [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea] process prioritised the line, but for Vanuatu, the relationship was more important than the line; the line was not to divide, but to bridge our nations. We just needed to sit down and share kava or betel nut and work it out without the experts pulling us back to coordinates and reef points. (Tevi, 2021, cited in Naupa, 2022, p. 1)

In each of these cases, Oceanic diplomacy resolved an intractable diplomatic rift. It is also notable that each case also required adaption to a modern diplomatic context (the relevant groups and players did not necessarily have shared protocols or a history of close kinship) and adjusting or setting aside state-based diplomatic practices. It was possible to fashion a hybrid set of protocols that were seen as observing fundamental traditional principles and acceptable to the parties involved. A fundamental and a common feature of the successful use of Oceanic diplomacy in these cases was the presence and active involvement of the custodians of the land. But there was also a shared belief that fundamental principles had been adhered to, with a particularly central principle, the tending of relationships, as a priority.

Conversely, where fundamental principles of Oceanic diplomacy are not adhered to, the legitimacy of the diplomatic practice comes into question and is recognised as mere window-dressing. Its effectiveness is therefore also diminished. This is seen in Jope Tara's argument, in this volume, that the Bainimarama government's promotion of the Talanoa Dialogue process as a Pacific contribution to climate diplomacy (while Fiji was chair of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2018) amounts to 'the appropriation of a shared Oceanic concept and reckless exotification of Fijian indigeneity'. This is because of the failure to consult the chiefly custodians of the concept in Fiji and elsewhere.

In his chapter, Anthony Tutugoro provides a second example of window-dressing in relation to the otherwise highly successful use of the traditional diplomatic welcome and acknowledgement protocols at all levels of modern politics of Kanaky (New Caledonia). He argues that legitimacy broke down when the national pro-independence party deployed the traditional protocols without the presence of the custodians of the land on which they were meeting.

Finally, Gordon Nanau argues in his chapter in this volume, that the otherwise successful '*popo* and *supu*' diplomacy of the Lengo speakers

of Guadalcanal failed when it was co-opted by the Solomon Islands government without due attention to the underlying protocols. He explains that ‘the popo and supu diplomatic system involves exchanges and contributions by kin and members of the larger community so parties must be identifiable and willing participants for it to be successful, especially in situations of reconciliation and compensation’. He argues that:

a failed attempt at such a reconciliation ceremony can be seen in the one organised by the national government and Guadalcanal and Malaita Provinces at the beginning of the Tensions in 1998–99. The militants, or who they purported to represent, were never part of the ceremony; nor were they clearly identified or willing to reconcile.

Nanau concludes that ‘in such a situation, using Oceanic diplomacy is meaningless and bound to fail. Popo and supu are acts of goodwill between people and communities and must therefore not be feigned to short-circuit genuine protocols.

Oceanic experience with Indigenous diplomacy thus warns against the adoption of a superficial approach to incorporating indigenous practices. Each of the foregoing cases emphasises the importance of tending relationships and the cultivation of diplomatic pathways between political communities rather than a prioritising of instrumental outcomes. And in each case, a broader set of traditional social actors are involved outside the state, creating connections that exceed what is possible through state sovereignty. They also involve care and time in devising an appropriate diplomatic culture that will enjoy legitimacy among the participants.

We therefore argue that Oceanic diplomacy has a major role to play in contemporary Pacific regional diplomacy, but not one that displaces other

influences. We assume that contemporary Pacific regional diplomatic culture has three key sources. First, there is the set of norms and practices stemming from the global order. This is the culture taught in diplomatic academies and reflected in the ways of foreign offices. These are western, now universal, practices. The second important source stems from the modern history of the Pacific states and their colonial histories. This is the regional culture created through the ideas and practice of regional self-determination reflected for example in the norms surrounding membership and equality in the regional organisations. It is expressed in the movement of Pacific leaders since the late 1960s to decolonise the structures of regional diplomacy and seen, for example, in the promotion of a 'new Pacific diplomacy' in the second decade of the 21st century (Fry, 2019; Fry & Tarte, 2015). We contend that Oceanic diplomacy provides a third important source of the norms that constitute contemporary Pacific regional diplomatic culture and practice, which is particularly important in resolving conflict and promoting regional solidarity in relation to global diplomacy.

## References

- Aswani, S., & Sheppard, P. (2003). The archaeology and ethnohistory of exchange in precolonial and colonial Roviana: Gifts, commodities, and inalienable possessions. *Current Anthropology*, 44(S5), S51–S78. <https://doi.org/10.1086/377667>
- Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2021, May). *Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/indigenous-diplomacy-agenda.pdf>
- Beier, J. M. (2009). *Indigenous diplomacies*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230102279>
- Beier, J. M. (2016). Indigenous diplomacy. In C. Constantinou, P. Kerr, & P. Sharp (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of diplomacy* (pp. 642–653). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957930.n53>

- Carter, S. G., & Fry, G. (2023). Australia's indigenous diplomacy and its regional resonance in Oceania. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 77(6), 656–663. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2023.2268024>
- D'Arcy, P. (2006). *The people of the sea: Environment, identity, and history in Oceania*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- D'Arcy, P. (2018). *Transforming Hawai'i: Balancing coercion and consent in eighteenth-century Kānaka Maoli statecraft*. ANU Press. <https://doi.org/10.22459/th.06.2018>
- D'Arcy, P. (2023). Long distance trade: The Pacific. In C. Antunes & E. Tagliacozzo (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of global migrations* (Vol. 1, pp. 91–107). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108767095>
- de Costa, R. (2009). Indigenous diplomacies before the nation-state. In J. M. Beier (Ed.), *Indigenous diplomacies* (pp. 61–77). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230102279\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230102279_5)
- Evett, J. (2022, October 7). *Does New Zealand's Indigenous diplomacy measure up?* Policy Forum. <https://www.policyforum.net/does-new-zealands-indigenous-diplomacy-measure-up/index.html>
- Fiji handed MSG chairmanship. (2010, December 16). *Solomon Times*. [www.solomontimes.com/news/fiji-handed-msg-chairmanship/5762](http://www.solomontimes.com/news/fiji-handed-msg-chairmanship/5762)
- Fry, G. (2019). *Framing the islands: Power and diplomatic agency in Pacific regionalism*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/FI.2019>
- Fry, G., & Tarte, S. (2015). *The new Pacific diplomacy*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/NPD.12.2015>
- Grincheva, N., & Kelley, R. (2019). Introduction: Non-state diplomacy from non-Western perspectives. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 14(3), 199–208.

- Gunson, N. (1990). The Tonga-Samoa connection 1777–1845: Some observations on the nature of Tongan imperialism. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 25(2), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223349008572634>
- Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our sea of islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6(1), 148–161.
- Kerwin, D. (2010). *Aboriginal dreaming paths and trading routes: The colonisation of the Australian economic landscape*. Sussex Academic Press.
- Kirch, P. (1991). Prehistoric exchange in western Melanesia, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 20, 141–165. <http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.20.100191.001041>
- Kitara, T. (2020, June 9). Tuvalu's foreign policy debate and values. *Devpolicy Blog*, Australian National University. <https://devpolicy.org/tuvalu-foreign-policy-and-values-20200609-2/>
- Komai, M. (2023, January 21). Fiji and Kiribati repair relations. PINA. <https://pina.com.fj/2023/01/21/fiji-and-kiribati-repair-relations/>
- Mahuta, N. (2021, February 4). *Inaugural foreign policy speech to diplomatic corps*. Beehive.govt.nz. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/inaugural-foreign-policy-speech-diplomatic-corps>
- Malinowski, B. (2013). *Argonauts of the western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. Routledge. (Original work published 1922)
- Marinaccio, J. (2021). 'We're not indigenous. We're just, we're us': Pacific perspectives on Taiwan's Austronesian diplomacy. In G. Smith & T. Wesley-Smith (Eds.), *The China alternative: Changing regional order in the Pacific Islands* (pp. 349–374). ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/CA.2021>

- Marinaccio, J. (2024). Oceanic diplomacy and foreign-policy making in Tuvalu: A values-based approach. *Third World Quarterly*, 45(3), 548–566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2275675>
- McConnell, F., & Dittmer, J. (2016). Diplomatic culture. In C. Constantinou, P. Kerr, & P. Sharp (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of diplomacy* (pp. 104–113). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957930.n9>
- Moore, C. (2017). *Making Mala: Malaita in Solomon Islands 1870s to 1930s*. ANU Press.
- National Press Club of Australia. (2022). *IN FULL: 2022 Foreign affairs debate with Marise Payne & Penny Wong, at the NPC* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/WrhTyW9PBuE?si=i9Q0fD-ZFkxSYKoE>
- Naupa, A. (2022). *Sealed with kava and betel nut: Lessons in Oceanic diplomacy from the Mota Lava Treaty* (DPA In Brief, 2022/11). Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/2SGH-D402>
- Neumann, I. (2018). A prehistorical evolutionary view of diplomacy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 14(3), 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-017-0089-z>
- New era of MSG solidarity: PM Philip (2010, December 17). *Solomon Times*. [www.solomontimes.com/news/new-era-of-msg-solidarity-pm-philip/5766](http://www.solomontimes.com/news/new-era-of-msg-solidarity-pm-philip/5766)
- Numelin, R. (1947). *Messengers, heralds, and envoys in savage societies*. Elanders Boktryckeri. (Reprinted from “Messengers, heralds, and envoys in savage societies”, 1947, *Transactions of the Westermarck Society* [1]).
- Office of the Prime Minister Fiji. (2023). *Prime Minister Rabuka presents “boka” and apology to the President of Kiribati and his people*. <https://www.pmooffice.gov.fj/prime-minister-rabuka-presents-boka-and-apology-to-the-president-of-kiribati-and-his-people/>

- Opondo, S. O. (2010). Decolonizing diplomacy: Reflections on African estrangement and exclusion. In C. M. Constantinou & J. Der Derian (Eds.), *Sustainable diplomacies* (pp. 109–127). Palgrave Macmillan. <http://doi.org/10.1057/9780230297159>
- Petersen, G. (2000). Indigenous island empires: Yap and Tonga considered. *Journal of Pacific History*, 35(1), 5–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223340050052275>
- Ravuvu, A. (1987). *The Fijian ethos*. Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Sénat coutumier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. (2014). *La Charte de Peuple kanak - Socle commun des valeurs et principes fondamentaux de la civilisation kanak* [Charter of the Kanak People – Common base of the fundamental values and principles of Kanak civilization]. <https://www.senat-coutumier.nc/les-actions-du-senat-coutumier/la-charte-du-peuple-kanak>
- Spies, Y. K. (2018). African diplomacy. In *The encyclopedia of diplomacy* (pp. 1–14). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118885154>
- Spriggs, M., & Wickler, S. (1989). Archaeological research on Erromango: Recent data on southern Melanesian prehistory. *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association*, 68–91.
- Westaway, M. (2023). Connections across the Coral Sea. *Antiquity*, 97(394), 1032–1038. <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.83>
- Wiseman, G., & Sharp, P. (2011). Diplomacy. In Devetak, R., George, J., & Percy, S. (Eds.). *An introduction to international relations* (2nd ed., pp. 256–267). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139196598.022>

## 2

# Pre-colonial regional systems in Oceania

PAUL D'ARCY

This chapter examines the *longue durée* of Pacific regional networks from 1500 CE onwards. These networks fulfilled key objectives and needs that saw them emphasised and maintained even in circumstances of local self-sufficiency. They also endured into the colonial era and after independence. The geographical extent and enduring quality of these networks in global terms challenges political theory's conventional assumption that centralised authority harnessing collective resources is vital to meet existential threats. Regular indigenous Tahiti-centred networks, for example, stretched the equivalent distance of Paris to Moscow. These vast networks – held together by emphasising local autonomy, fluid responses to environmental challenges, and trans-local higher authority – lost consent if they failed to return local benefit. In this regard, these enduring Pacific institutions hold lessons for all of humanity and for modern Pacific regional discourse.

While Spain established an imperial toehold in the Mariana Islands in the far north-east of the Pacific Islands in the 17th century, most Pacific polities and societies continued to evolve according to indigenous priorities in this period. Trade and other inter-island interactions were among these priorities. As well as extending potential resource bases, these networks fulfilled key social and political objectives. Long voyages between archipelagos were still undertaken in several areas after 1770. Regular voyaging occurred between the Society Islands and the Tuamotus in Central Eastern Polynesia, between Tonga, Samoa and Fiji in Western Polynesia, and between the coral islands of the Western Caroline Islands and their mountainous high island neighbours in Micronesia. Local traditions, the distribution of cultural traits, and observations by literate outsiders all attest to inter-island voyaging within most archipelagos (Kirch, 2017; D'Arcy, 2006).

The remarkable logistical capacity of these numerically small, largely consensus-based Pacific communities and the geographical extent of these trading and other exchanges challenge world history literature still dominated by the false perception that enduring ocean voyaging required sophisticated organisation built upon the requisitioning of significant national resources by a centralised state apparatus. This chapter examines these three networks before outlining the enduring motivations and necessary cultural institutions and protocols required to sustain them.

## **Regional networks in Western Micronesia**

The Caroline Islands consist of a few mountainous high islands and many atolls in the far western Pacific just over 1,000 km east of the Philippines. One of the most dramatic testimonies to modern scholars and contemporary European officials' underestimation of the expansive world of indigenous peoples in this region comes in the form of extensive interviews conducted with Ifalik drift voyagers from the Central Caroline Islands by Frater Miedes in 1664. Ifalik is a small atoll in the Central Caroline Islands that had a population of 500 in the 1660s. Miedes was

informed that they knew of a vast world beyond their atoll and beyond the usual sailing limits generally ascribed to them by modern scholars. They relied on a mix of remembered and first-hand information to name 83 individual islands spanning the entire east- to- west length of their Carolinian home archipelago, as well as reaching north to Spanish Guam; westward to incorporate Miangas, the Talaud Islands and the Ternate area of modern Indonesia; and south to Manus Island, the Sepik coast and Bismarck Archipelago - in modern day Papua New Guinea (Levesque, 1993). The core area of the Ifalik people's regular voyaging stretched 1,523 km from Yap in the west to Chuuk in the east, and 689 km from Ifalik in the south to Guam in the north. However, their expanded area of navigationally charted knowledge stretched 3,983 km west to east, from Ternate to Kosrae, and 2,123 km north to south, from Guam to Rabaul. To place this small island's geographical range and knowledge in perspective, the distance from Paris to Moscow is 2,839 km and from New York to San Francisco 4,129 km.

Frazer Miede's record is not an isolated source. Many Micronesian drift voyages are recorded to Sulawesi, Mindanao, Samar and Leyte in Spanish colonial records. Most recorded voyagers are described as 'drift voyagers', although some of those interviewed knew where their home island was and many were eager to set sail and return. The 19th-century Russian explorer Otto von Kotzebue was informed that sweet potato and other useful exotic seed crops had been brought to Yap from the Visayas by historical two-way voyages conducted by Carolinians sometime in the 1700s. The neighbouring Palauan word *chemuti* (sweet potato) clearly derives from *camote* or *kamote*, the name for the crop throughout the Philippines, and argues for a rapid introduction from the Philippines soon after their introduction to the Philippines by the Spanish in the 16th century (Kotzebue, 1821/1967).

The core area of Caroline Islands' exchanges took place between the mountainous high islands of Chuuk and Yap and the numerous atolls in between them. The proximity of islands in the Western Carolines

promoted inter-island ties. Few sea gaps exceeded one day's sail in good conditions. Many clans had members on a number of atolls in the chain, and inter-island exchanges were usually conducted between members of the same kin group. For example, anthropologist William Lessa noted that the Mongolfach clan had members on 10 atolls from Ulithi to Puluwat, and beyond to the mountainous high islands of Chuuk Lagoon. While these links largely served as refuges and food reservoirs in case of natural hazards, some island-specific goods were in high demand from other atolls. Tobacco grown on Fais, for example, was much sought after in Ulithi and Yap. Both Ulithi and Fais obtained canoes from Woleai, while Fais received shell ornaments and belts from the coral islands to the east.

Other inter-atoll exchanges revolved around acknowledgment of atoll hierarchy. The *hu* was a system of semi-annual exchanges between Lamotrek, Elato and Satawal, in which the others acknowledged the senior status of Lamotrek. Lamotrek received turtles from Elato, and *mar* (fermented breadfruit paste) and ripe coconuts from Satawal, in return for the right to forage on the uninhabited coral islands to the north controlled by Lamotrek. These two atolls had the right to ask for food from Lamotrek when they were in need (Alkire, 1965).

The main regional interaction in the Western Carolines was the *sawei* exchange system. This exchange relationship, which centred on Yap and extended 900 nautical miles east to Namonuito Atoll, consisted of regular and lengthy visits from low island fleets to Yap to present tribute and exchange goods. Historian Mark Berg (1992) cites traditional evidence tracing the *sawei* exchange in the Caroline Islands back to 800 years BP. Carolinian atoll dwellers made an annual voyage to the mountainous high island of Yap during which products were exchanged. The coral islanders gave shells highly prized by the Yapese, and manufactures such as sennit twine and woven cloth, in return for turmeric, pots and woods unavailable on their atolls. The delivery of the *sawei* tribute occurred every one to three years. The tribute fleet contained representatives of

all atolls from Yap to Chuuk. They delivered their tribute to Gachpar village in Gagil district of Yap. The fleet set out from Namonuito and went from island to island in a set order, picking up representatives. The fleet increased the further west it sailed until it numbered 10 or more canoes (Berg, 1992; D'Arcy, 2006).

The fleet set sail during the season of the north-east winds between December and June, and remained in Gachpar for a few months until the winds changed to the south-west to allow a relatively easy passage home. Three distinct forms of tribute were presented: religious tribute to the Carolinian deity Yongelap, canoe tribute presented to the chiefs of Gachpar, and tribute of the land presented by individual outer island lineages to their Yapese lineage hosts. During their stay on Yap, outer island 'children' were also required to show their Yapese 'parents' respect. In return, their hosts were obliged to take care of them and give them gifts when they left. Informal trading was also conducted during the stay.

Outer islanders received more than they gave in the tribute and trading exchanges in Gachpar. Yapese also fed and sheltered them. The atoll dwellers brought *thu* (woven banana fibre loincloths), sennit twine, turtle and coconut shell, mother of pearl shell and *Spondylus* shell. Yapese also occasionally purchased canoes from Woleai. In return, the Yapese gave turmeric used as a cosmetic skin paste, red earth pigment, *Tridacna* shell, whetstones, orange wood used in ancestral altars, and Polynesian chestnuts. Occasionally they also contributed wood for canoes.

The disproportionate price Gachpar paid to its atoll tributaries was justified by the status it conferred from having overseas tributaries and the power the distribution of atoll goods could have on securing political allies on Yap. Yap was divided into two rival camps during the 19th century. Broadly speaking, the districts of Tomil and Rull were allied against Gagil. In more precise terms, Gagil chiefs were prominent among the *vaani pagal* (young men's party), while the chiefs of Tomil and Rull dominated the *vaani pilung* (chiefs' party). These groups cut across

district boundaries and constantly sought to maintain and extend their alliances. *Spondylus* shell from the outer islands was particularly valued by Yapese. This shell was made into much sought after *gau* (shell money). *Spondylus* shell was only available in three locations in the region: Eauripik Atoll, Udot Island in Chuuk, and Etal Atoll in the Mortlock Islands. In contrast, Gachpar's main rival, the *vaani pilung*, sought high-quality aragonite to secure allies from the mountainous high island of Babeldaob in Palau to the south. In this relationship however, the Yapese were the guests rather than the hosts. The aragonite was quarried into massive slabs of stone money known as *fei* and precariously rafted back to Yap.

Seasonal winds dictated the broad pattern of inter-island visits. The north-east trade winds (from November and June) favoured visits to islands to the west, while the south-west winds (from June to October) facilitated travel to the east. The south-west winds coincided with the season of plenty when the breadfruit became ripe and fishing was good. Large inter-island exchanges occurred during the first few months of this season. However, September and October were noted for strong winds and typhoons, so that travel was avoided whenever possible. The *sawei* fleets departed for Yap towards the end of the north-east trade wind season in February or March. The arrival of the *sawei* fleet during this season placed strains on the Gachpar economy, but it would not be long before the winds changed and the homeward journey could be made.

## Regional networks in Western Polynesia

The second regional network of major long-distance trade in this period involved the triangle of archipelagos in the central Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. The relationships involved the exchange of valued locality-specific resources, chiefly marriage partners and ceremonially valued prestige items. Kaeppler (1978) demonstrates that exchanges of goods need to be understood as components of social and political marriage exchanges between chiefly families in the three groups, which enhanced

the status of all who participated. Such items included sperm whale teeth known as *tabua* in the central Pacific. These largely derived from dead whales that washed ashore in Tonga and were exchanged as far away as the neighbouring Fijian and Samoan archipelagos. Similarly, '*ie tōga* (finely woven Samoan mats) were highly prized as prestigious exchange items in the same three archipelagos with their pedigree of their exchanges an intrinsic part of their cultural value. Such mats might take years to complete. They were exchanged at important ceremonies such as funerals as symbols of mutual respect between family units known as '*aiga*. Each exchange added value to the '*ie tōga* as they were passed between families and generations. Some became so valued that they were given individual names and served as living historical documents of exchanges and alliances (Kaepler, 1978).

Fijian chiefly families provided husbands for Tongan chiefly families, while those of Samoa provided wives for Tongan chiefs. Status items such as fine Samoan mats, Tongan *tabua* (whale teeth), and Fijian red parrot feathers were exchanged to cement these bonds as well as more utilitarian items like sailing canoes and pottery. These exchanges have been shown to be longstanding, dating back probably at least 1,000 years before they were observed by Europeans in the 19th century (Davidson, 1978; Gunson, 1990).

A series of regular local economic and social exchanges also took place across Western Polynesia to trade goods with limited local distribution and to reinforce peaceful relations between communities. Turmeric and arrowroot were manufactured exclusively by certain districts of Samoa and exchanged for other items, such as fishing nets and wooden bowls. The poor soils of the low dry islands of the Southern Lau Group in eastern Fiji were famous for producing high-quality hardwoods, *nokonoko* (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) for war clubs, and *vesi* (*Intsia bijuga*) for kava bowls and canoe hulls, prompting the rise of local expertise in the manufacture of these products. Rotumans sailed to Tonga for white shells used to decorate their chiefly houses and canoes, while Tongans

traded bark cloth; stings from stingray tails used as spear tips; *tabua* (whale tooth ornaments) and pearl shells for red parrot feathers for ceremonial items; and *vesi* canoe wood and sandalwood for scenting coconut oil. Samoan fine mats were in demand across the region. These exchanges often took place as part of institutionalised inter-village visits involving large parties that might consist of an entire village visiting another with large-scale exchanges of goods. These were known as *malaga* in Samoa and *solevu* in Fiji, and could involve years of preparation. These institutions carried an expectation of reciprocity and served to enhance inter-village peaceful relations in contexts where intermarriage between villages created geographically dispersed kin networks. Tongans were the most wide-ranging travellers in the region – travelling frequently within the Tongan archipelago as well as visiting and residing in Fiji often for years at a time. A number of Tongan and Samoan chiefly lines had strong ties, involving ongoing marriage links, frequent visits and occasional large-scale movements between the two island groups to assist in power struggles or to join local communities.

Tonga, situated in the south and centre of the triangle, was the centre of the exchanges, with few exchanges going directly between Samoa and Fiji. Vava'u, the main northern island of the Tongan archipelago, is 848 km east of Fiji's main mountainous high island of Viti Levu, and 576 km south-west of the Samoan archipelago's closest island, Savai'i. The region's predominant trade winds blow from the south-east to the north-west, facilitating passages from Tonga to Fiji, and the region's sophisticated open ocean canoes and sail designs were far superior to European vessels of the time in both tacking into and across the wind. Their vessels were also considerably larger than those of the first European explorers to reach the region, such as Abel Tasman, who encountered Tonga and Fiji in early 1643. The largest local vessels were up to 36 m long and capable of carrying 45 tonnes of cargo and well over 100 passengers. The vessels encountered in this region by European explorers from Tasman to Captain James Cook in the 1770s appear to have been relatively recent

developments, dating back at earliest to the 1600s and reaching their zenith towards the end of the period under review from the mid-1700s until the late 1800s CE.

Foremost among these vessels was the *drua* (double-hulled canoe, which transformed the region's trade exchanges and political rivalries through its superior carrying capacity, hull dynamics and sail and rigging capacity. The key material component was *vesi* wood for *drua* hulls. This grew in the limestone islands of the Southern Lau Group between Fiji and Tonga. *Vesi* was heavier, stronger and more resistant to rot and Teredo worms than any other Pacific timber, and the only wood capable of withstanding the water pressure on hulls as large as those of *drua* driven by sails that pushed them along at speeds that the hulls of all previous vessels could not withstand.

Although Tongans came to dominate the Southern Lau Group to gain access to *vesi* wood, the *drua* was very much the outcome of region-wide collaborative expertise as well as testimony to extensive ties and flows of ideas beyond the immediate Western Polynesian triangle. The sail, rigging and hull designs were borrowed from those of the *proa* (Carolinian outrigger canoe) that facilitated the voyaging range of Caroline Islanders from the Pacific north-west. They were most likely introduced into Western Polynesia by the Tongans, who were the most adventurous of the region's seafarers. Within the region, Fijian shipwrights, the waterproof planking techniques of Samoa's Lemaki clan, and the navigational and seafaring knowledge of the Tongans were relocated and combined in situ in the Southern Lau Group to turn this locality into the *drua* production centre of the region. *Drua* orders flooded in from ambitious chiefs, bolstering production, starting a naval arms race and also transforming the trading economy of Western Polynesia and beyond. It could take up to seven years to complete a *drua*, which, understandably, became a source of community pride and prestige when delivered. *Drua* were known across Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, 'Uvea, Rotuma and Futuna, and most likely also in Tokelau and Niue to the east – possibly even in Rarotonga,

given its chiefly links with Manu'a in Samoa – as well as south-west to New Caledonia and north to Tuvalu.

While the core of the *drua* zone remained the Western Polynesian triangle, the zone of extended knowledge and influence extended 1,742 km from Tuvalu in the north to Tonga in the south, and 1,393 km from Viti Levu in Fiji in the west to Manu'a in Samoa in the far east. Rarotonga, in the Cook Islands, lies a further 1,287 km south-east from Manu'a. Remarkably, the nearest point in the zone of *proa* canoe variants that served as the model for this nautical revolution in Western Polynesia is 3,206 km away in southern Kiribati. The core area of classical and distinct *proa* design is the previously mentioned Ifalik Atoll in the Central Caroline Islands, which is a further 5,325 km from southern Kiribati (Nuttall et al., 2014).

## Regional networks in Eastern Polynesia

Much recent historical research on Eastern Polynesian navigation and voyaging routes has focused on the testimony of the Tahitian priest and navigator Tupaia, who named 74 islands for Captain James Cook at the end of our period. Tupaia accompanied Cook when he left Tahiti and voyaged to a number of Pacific destinations beyond the normal sailing range of Tahitian and other Eastern Polynesian seafarers. Europeans divided the Pacific into three cultural-geographical zones that coincided with differences they perceived in appearance. Micronesia stretched from Palau to Kiribati in the north-west Pacific, while the south Pacific was divided into Melanesia west of Fiji and Polynesia east of Fiji. The only Polynesian groups not referred to by Tupaia seem to have been Aotearoa (the Māori name for modern-day New Zealand), Hawai'i and the Gambier Islands. However, a recent (2013) in-depth study of Tahitian navigation by a Tahitian expert, the late Jean-Claude Teriierooiterai, outlined Tahitian navigational paths to Hawai'i. Tupaia conceded that he had only visited nine islands in the Society Islands, the volcanic island of Meheti'a (110 km east of Tahiti), Rurutu (570 km south-east of

Tahiti, in the Austral Islands) and 'Manua'. Anthropologist Greg Denning believed that Tupaia's Manua is the small Cook Islands atoll of Manuae, three days' sail north-east of Rurutu. Others claim that it refers to Manu'a in Samoa. Historian Niel Gunson (1997) notes that the chiefly families of Manu'a and Manuae were linked by marriage. The remaining islands were part of the pool of navigational knowledge remembered and passed down between generations of navigators.<sup>1</sup>

Tupaia's chart is a small component of the vast corpus of Eastern Polynesian navigational lore and traditions on inter-island contacts and alliances that is available in historical sources or has been retained and transmitted by Tahitian experts through to the present. This knowledge reveals an expansive, connected world centred on the Society Islands, or more correctly, centred on the Taputapuātea Marae on the island of Ra'iātea, the religious centre of the Eastern Polynesian world by the 1500 to 1800 CE period under review. Ra'iātea is 234 km north-east of Tahiti. Regular trade exchanges and political alliances and social exchanges took place within and between a number of archipelagos in the region, forming a coherent, known world of shared knowledge, centred on the Society Islands. Tahiti is the southernmost island of the Society Island group whose northernmost island, Motu One, is 579 km to the north-east. This extended cultural world measured 2,554 km from Rarotonga in the south-east to Nuku Hiva in the north-west and 2,198 km from Motu One in the north-east to Mangareva in the south-west. It consisted of the Cook Islands, 1,155 km south-east of Tahiti; the Austral Islands, 570 km south of Tahiti; and the Tuamotu Archipelago, composed entirely of atolls beginning 339 km north-west of Tahiti and ending near to the Gambier Island group centred on Mangareva, 1,619 km south-west of Tahiti. The western limits of this area are marked by

---

1 See Tērierooiterai (2013) on the regular voyaging range, including voyaging to Rapa Nui and Aotearoa (pp. 206–207, 318–320, 324–329) and on navigational paths to Cook Islands and the Marquesas (pp. 202–209). See also, *Ancient Tahiti* (Henry, 1928) and 'Great families of Polynesia' (Gunson, 1997, pp. 142–144).

the Tuamotuan atoll of Reao, 1,384 km from Tahiti, and the Marquesan group, 1,399 km north-west of Tahiti. Although the Marquesan Islands and Gambier Islands were relatively isolated from the rest of this wider cultural world in the period under review, they were not totally isolated. Traditional knowledge collected in the 19th century by Tahitian Teuira Henry also recorded navigational chants referring to Pitcairn Island, 2,310 km south-east of Tahiti, and Aotearoa, 3,791 km south-west of Tahiti, although neither were part of the tropical Eastern Polynesian world of 1500 to 1800 CE.

Mountainous 'high island' communities and nearby coral island communities regularly exchanged specialist manufactures. For example, Tuamotu atoll dwellers traded pearls, pearl shell, turtles, dog fur and mats for high island products from the Society archipelago. Food items were also exchanged between mountainous high islands despite their relatively greater resource base. The chiefs of Tahiti procured parakeet feathers and canoes from the Leeward Islands such as Ra'iātea, yams from neighbouring Mo'orea and Huahine. Regular exchanges were also made with Taha'a and Bora Bora, with Tahitian tapa exchanged for those islands' prized manufacture, bamboo filled with coconut oil. Just as in Fiji and Samoa, Tahitians conducted large-scale visits between communities and islands that might take one year to plan and last for months. These visits reinforced community ties on islands and chiefly political alliances between districts and islands. Traditions preserved in historical records note chiefly family links between the Society, Austral, Tuamotu and Cook Islands, including occasional resettlement of communities from one island chain to another. The English beachcomber James Morrison, for example, noted that the high-status Tamatoa chiefly line connected Tubuai in the Austral Islands to Ra'iātea. Indeed, Captain James Cook noted that the great families of Tahiti, Mo'orea, Huahine, Bora Bora and Ra'iātea were all related (Lewthwaite, 1966; Oliver, 1974).

Perhaps the most compelling traditional evidence of inter-island links across a vast expanse of Eastern Polynesia is the sacred marae network

centred on the region's preeminent marae – Taputapuātea at Opoa on Ra'iatea. Just as the Society Islands were at the heart of a vast trade and navigation network encompassing the southern Cook Islands, the Austral Islands and Tuamotu, Taputapuātea was linked to other marae across the Society Islands and beyond. For example, the marae contained sacred marae stones from the Cook Islands. It was initially the most prestigious marae for the cult of Ta'aroa, and it maintained its centrality during the emergence of the new religious sect dedicated to 'Oro, the god of war, which came to dominate the Society Islands, supplanting the previous dominant god, Ta'aroa. Unique to the Society Islands was the Arioi society, associated with the worship of the ascendant god 'Oro, and drawn from all ranks of society across the archipelago. Arioi touring groups of up to 700 people toured the islands entertaining host communities with dances, songs, plays and social satire. The missionary Robert Thomson dated the arrival of the Arioi cult associated with 'Oro to 1730 or 1740. However, another missionary, John Davies, believed the 'Oro cult had arisen in Opoa during the 1600s CE, and had reached Tahiti in the second half of that century or the early 1700s.<sup>2</sup>

## **Major influences underlying Pacific Island networks 1500 to 1800 CE**

Three influences interacted to create these patterns of trade and exchange across the vast breadth of Oceania prior to European colonisation. The first was resource differentiation between localities in combination with the logistical and skill base requirements to move goods and people between different resource localities. The second was social, cultural and political drivers for community exchanges in which the trade of items might form an important component. The third was the necessity of expanding access to resource bases in communities' immediate vicinities

---

2 Oliver (1972, Vol. 2, pp. 914–928, 1106–1108). Oliver estimates that the *Arioi* constituted 20 per cent of the population at most (p. 1106). The best primary account is Henry (1928, pp. 237–241).

due to the threat of natural hazards devastating localities with little warning. In the Pacific Islands in general, trade defined as the exchange of material goods was often also a means to more valued social and political alliances.

Where mountainous high islands existed within archipelagos also containing atolls, there were regular exchanges of atoll shells valued for currency or canoes for high island canoe timber and other flora not available on atolls. However, regular exchanges also took place between island types with largely identical resources, such as between atolls and between mountainous high islands. This might occasionally be because of locality specific high-quality resources, such as obsidian volcanic glass used for cutting implements, from Talasea on the island of New Britain in PNG, which was traded as far as the island that became known as Borneo in modern-day Indonesia (Summerhayes, 2009).

More often, however, the exchange of goods also served a social and political purpose in which the item was as much symbolic as practical, to forge political alliances between chiefly houses or social alliances between clans through intermarriage. Intermarriage extended resource bases by extending kin links that could be called upon in times of hardship such as prolonged drought or in the devastating immediacy of natural disasters such as typhoons or volcanic eruptions. Certain items were valued more for their status value than their practical application or rarity in the recipient's society, although high status did often derive partly from relative scarcity. Examples include ceremonial staffs or chiefly feathered capes made from the feathers of numerous birds.

Exchanges of goods and spouses extended beyond neighbouring archipelagos and beyond the range of any one political ruler. Historian Niel Gunson has documented the extent of the inter-archipelago chiefly marriage links for the eastern and central Pacific, noting marriage connections between Tahiti and Cook Island dynasties, Cook Island and Samoan ruling families and Fijian, Tongan and Samoan chiefly families

(Gunson, 1997). To put this in global perspective, the distance from Viti Levu in Fiji to Ra'iatea in the Society Islands is 3,237 km, compared to 2,839 km from Paris to Moscow.

As well as fulfilling social and political needs, long distance exchange was also a practical necessity emerging from occupying a demanding environment. In the Pacific Islands, short-term environmental perturbations and unpredictable changes from external elements fostered expectations of unheralded elements intruding from beyond the horizon; curiosity about where these elements came from; and flexible, opportunistic strategies to cope with this, at times, uncertain world. Once established, most Pacific Islander societies developed some form of inter-island marriage or trade links with other communities to insulate themselves against climatic variability in rainfall, El Niño cycles and natural disasters such as typhoons.

Many Pacific coastal communities had the capacity to move entire populations by sea for social exchanges but also especially to relocate if hit by natural hazards and climatic threats that were a regular part of island life. The Pacific is regularly subject to geological hazards such as earthquakes, volcanic activity and tsunamis; and climate hazards such as typhoons, floods, landslides, drought and El Niño–La Niña cycles. The Pacific Ring of Fire is a belt of volcanic activity that circles the entire Pacific, while tsunamis generated in one corner of the Pacific can touch shores on the other side of this vast ocean with devastating impact. Major volcanic eruptions can affect climate and global food production for years.

These climatic forces can cause prolonged drought in localities or heavy flooding. These natural hazards required economies to be able to store surpluses in times of plenty and also to draw on wider regional economies through trade and social alliances in times of need.

The volcanic eruption in 1452 on the island of Kuwae in what is now central Vanuatu was one of the eight largest volcanic events in the past

10,000 years. It hurled at least 30 million cubic metres of rock, earth and magma into the atmosphere and created enough dust to circle the world, remain in the atmosphere for three years, and block enough sunlight to create unseasonal and prolonged winters that stunted crop and vegetation growth in China and Europe, resulting in thousands of deaths from freezing and starvation. Disruptions and forced migrations are also recorded in this part of the Pacific, including the cessation of the trade of local kava with distant Tonga (Luders, 1996). Seismic disturbances on the sea floor generate shock waves that may give rise to a tsunami.

The Caroline Islands lie within a corridor known as Typhoon Alley, where the majority of the world's typhoons either form or pass through on their way westward and northward towards Asia's Pacific Rim. In response to the frequency of natural disasters, many clans had members and intermarriage links on a number of Carolinian atolls to which they could flee if natural disasters struck their home community. Each coral island's potential carrying capacity generally exceeded its actual population during optimum conditions, enabling refugees to be accommodated. This was amply demonstrated in World War II when many atolls blockaded by United States forces were able to feed their own populations as well as Japanese garrisons.

## **Pacific diplomacy 1500 to 1800 CE: Protocols and institutions**

A core responsibility of Pacific community leaders in this era was ensuring that the complex array of institutions and resources required to maintain community capacity to voyage between locations was maintained. In the Pacific, this meant maintaining sufficient navigational expertise, sailing skills and logistical capacity to supply adequate nutrition and sailing vessels for large voyaging expeditions that might be absent for lengthy periods, or to host such fleets from elsewhere, and also to overproduce to accommodate for the absence of a portion of adults who might be away at any one time. One of the least acclaimed political achievements of the Pacific Island peoples was the ability to create such surplus

capacity through consent-based, mutually beneficial, highly organised community labour (D'Arcy, 2006). This is perhaps the greatest lesson of the ancestors for today's leaders and advocates of Pacific unity.

All exchanges and voyaging in the period 1500 to 1800 required advanced diplomatic skills and social sensitivity to facilitate long stays off-island that seasonal winds or unanticipated storms or opportunities might demand, generally in circumstances where the visitor was reliant on the goodwill of the numerically superior hosts. Master navigators often acted as diplomats and envoys – it is no accident that many of the first Pacific Islanders to become known to the European world were navigators. Maintaining correct relations with other communities was also important. The arrival of outsiders across the sea differed from arrival of those overland, because there were fewer intermediaries to warn of their approach. Visitor protocol usually consisted of signalling one's friendly intentions and acknowledging the sovereignty of the host. This often took the form of approaching the shore with sails lowered, and reporting to the local ruler immediately.<sup>3</sup> Voyagers visiting Chuuk were required to leave their sails with the local chief until they left. By this act, they surrendered themselves to the ruler's protection, as their means of leaving was removed. In return, actual or designated kin treated the visitors hospitably. They were well fed and entertained.<sup>4</sup>

The humbleness and astute diplomatic skills required by navigators to interact with regular and unexpected communities in which they were always the minority is still required by Pacific representatives today in dealings with larger Pacific Rim and global players on matters from trade to global warming mitigation. The same humility and astute sensitivity to personal feelings always grounded in the mana accruing from mastering a skilled profession with humility and dignity that served

---

3 For example, see Adelbert von Chamisso in Kotzebue (1821/1967, Vol.3, p. 207) and Lessa (1966, pp. 17–18, 45–46).

4 Adelbert von Chamisso in Kotzebue (1821/1967, Vol. 3, p. 212) and Lutke (1835–1836, Vol. 3, p. 32).

generations of Pacific navigators still applies today. These attributes also characterised internal Pacific relations. Pacific communities could construct and maintain far more canoes per head of population than almost any human community in history, but they rarely did so by means of coercion. Cooperation and conceding some autonomy in exchange for collective benefit was more often the case across the Pacific Islands. Even today, a feature that sets the Pacific apart from other parts of the world is the generally high level of state recognition of customary tenure and the large number of nation-states where indigenous peoples form the majority of the population and government representatives.

### **The ongoing importance of external connections**

The vast majority of Pacific Island populations inhabited the large continental islands of the Pacific south-west and west of Fiji in what was later called Melanesia. While this area's coastal peoples also conducted maritime trade, most exchanges were much more localised than those covered above. The European presence in the Pacific increased dramatically after 1800, creating new opportunities and mediums for exchange, but also eventually restricting the traditional cultural worlds by imposing colonial boundaries and other administrative restrictions on indigenous long-distance exchanges. This was especially so in Eastern Polynesia, and least so in the Caroline Islands, due to limited coercive and policing capacity. While thousands of Pacific islanders from Polynesia, and to a lesser extent Micronesia, served as crew on Western commercial vessels, and Western trade goods entered traditional trade networks, Western disease decimated island populations and allowed a relatively easy colonial takeover. Hundreds of thousands of Melanesians served as plantation labourers away from their home district, or off their home island, in the so-called labour trade of the last half of the 1800s, bringing back knowledge of the wider world and payment in Western goods (Corris, 1973). In the modern, post-independence era, Polynesians and Micronesians have exported their labour from crowded

resource poor islands to the economies of former colonial powers to develop remittance economies, while Melanesian nation trade has mainly focused on their abundant mineral, timber and fish resources sought by the booming economies of the Pacific Rim. Long distance trade and exchanges remain central to the vibrancy of Pacific Island societies, but in ways local communities have far less control over.

This chapter has suggested another way forward, one which draws upon past lessons from generations of Pacific ancestors. It is a path that can substantially reduce externally driven dependence and exploitation; emphasises sustainable economic development based on environmental affinity and guardianship; celebrates and accommodates diversity and multiple voices; and is ultimately consent-based, as any action requiring broad adoption must be. The next generation seeking to enhance Pacific ways need to remember the importance of maintaining sustainable communications infrastructure, schooling new generations of diplomats/navigators to be sensitive to negotiating with larger entities, and reinforcing the consent-based decision-making that has served countless generations of Pacific communities.

## References

- Alkire, W. H. (1965). *Lamotrek Atoll and inter-island socioeconomic ties*. The University of Illinois Press.
- Berg, M. L. (1992). Yapese politics, Yapese money and the Sawei tribute network before World War I. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 27(2), 150–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223349208572704>
- Corris, P. (1973). *Passage, port and plantation: A history of Solomon Islands labour migration, 1870–1914*. Melbourne University Press.

- D'Arcy, P. (2006). *The people of the sea: Environment, identity, and history in Oceania*. University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824846381>
- Davidson, J. M. (1978). Western Polynesia and Fiji: The archaeological evidence. *Mankind*, 11(3), 383–390. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1835-9310.1978.tb00667.x>
- Gunson, N. (1990). The Tonga-Samoa connection 1777–1845: Some observations on the nature of Tongan imperialism. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 25(2), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223349008572634>
- Gunson, N. (1997). Great families of Polynesia: Inter-island links and marriage patterns. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 32(2), 139–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223349708572835>
- Henry, T. (1928). *Ancient Tahiti*. Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum.
- Kaepler, A. L. (1978). Exchange patterns in goods and spouses: Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 11(3), 246–252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1835-9310.1978.tb00655.x>
- Kirch, P. V. (2017). *On the road of the winds: An archaeological history of the Pacific Islands before European contact* (Rev. ed.). University of California Press
- Kotzebue, O. von. (1967). *A voyage of discovery into the South Sea and Bebring's Straits, in search of a north-east passage, undertaken in the years 1815, 16, 17, and 18 in the ship Rurick* (Vols. 1–3). N. Israel; Da Capo Press. (Original work published 1821)
- Lessa, W. A. (1966). *Ulithi: A Micronesian design for living*. Holt, Reinhart and Winston.
- Levesque, R. (Ed.). (1993). *History of Micronesia: A collection of source documents*. Levesque Publications.

- Lewthwaite, G. R. (1966). Man and the sea in early Tahiti: A maritime economy through European eyes. *Pacific Viewpoint*, 7(1), 28–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.71002>
- Luders, D. (1996). Legend and history: Did the Vanuatu-Tonga kava trade cease in AD 1447? *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 105(3), 287–310.
- Lutke, F. (1835–1836). *Voyage autour du monde exécuté par ordre de Sa Majesté l'Empereur Nicholas Ier* (Vols. 1–3; HRAF translation No. 1,317–1,319). Firmin Didot.
- Nuttall, P., D'Arcy, P., & Philip, C. (2014). Waqa Tabu – sacred ships: The Fijian *drua*. *International Journal of Maritime History*, 26(3), 427–450. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0843871414542736>
- Oliver, D. L. (1974). *Ancient Tahitian society* (Vols. 1– 2). University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvp2n5ds>
- Summerhayes, G. R. (2009). Obsidian network patterns in Melanesia – sources, characterisation and distribution. *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association*, 29, 109–123.
- Teriierooiterai, J. C. (2013). *Mythes, astronomie, découpage du temps et navigation traditionnelle: L'héritage océanien contenu dans les mots de la langue tahitienne* [Myths, astronomy, division of time and traditional navigation: The Oceanic heritage contained in the words of the Tahitian language] [Unpublished PhD thesis]. Université de Polynésie française.



# 3

## **Diplomacy and the pursuit of peace in pre-Christian Fiji**

ROBERT NICOLE

An often-quoted statement in the early 1840s by the Cakaudrove chief Ratu Lewenilovo to the resident British missionary Thomas Williams claimed that Fijians were ‘like the ocean’, caught up in an endless cycle of ebbs and flows that did not allow them any rest. ‘We know no peace,’ he told Williams (1858/1982, p. 128; see also Henderson in Williams, 1931, p. 327, Footnote 52). This statement is one of many that have formed the dominant narrative about pre-Christian Fiji: that it was a dark and violent age of incessant warfare in which peace was non-existent.

This chapter offers an alternative reading of Fiji’s history, one that challenges this view. It asks whether ordinary Fijians and their leaders ever reached political settlements without resorting to violence, and if so, how? By digging beneath the grand narrative of Fijian warfare, by reading documents ‘against the grain’, and by combing the archive for traces of cultures of peace, I argue that Ratu Lewenilovo’s claim can be unsettled. Pre-Christian Fijians enjoyed substantial periods of peace, because they had developed a wide array of diplomatic mechanisms,

institutions, customs and relationships to variously avoid, postpone and manage their conflicts. In this chapter, the focus is on the role that pre-Christian forms of diplomacy played in mediating conflicts.

Periods of peace in pre-Christian Fiji did not occur by accident. They were contingent on the existence of mechanisms that allowed for the resolution of conflicts before they degenerated into war. Fijians developed numerous such mechanisms, many of which are best discussed under the rubric of 'diplomacy'. In Fiji, as Brewster aptly put it, the way of diplomacy was 'proverbially long' (1937, pp. 45–46). Among the central elements of this diplomacy were two key offices – the *matanivanua* (chiefly herald or spokesperson) and the *mataki* (envoy). Most early European visitors to Fiji commented on the power and strategic importance of these positions and of the specialised hereditary clans they came from.

### **Matanivanua, mataki and envoy clans**

The word 'matanivanua' is often taken to mean the 'eye, face, presence' in the land (Hocart, 1913, p. 109; Tuwere, 2002, p. 83). It has often been translated into English as 'the herald'. As such, *matanivanua* were persons who oversaw important ceremonial occasions, carried important messages and made announcements or proclamations on behalf of the chief. Yet, the English word 'herald' is a poor reflection of the range of functions and powers held by *matanivanua*. Indeed, a great debate emerged in the 1910s within the Fijian Society, a group of local residents interested in all aspects of Fiji and its indigenous culture, about the precise full significance of *matanivanua*. One of its members, GFAW Beauclerc, argued that *matanivanua* (who were almost always men) were the 'front' of the land; that is, 'persons put forward by a country, large or small, to be their spokesman in any negotiations with another place' (Beauclerc, 1915, p. 2). He then set out to describe in detail the protocols observed in the lead up to the meeting of two tribes:

In all cases of a people approaching a chief, or another people, whether to make a capitulation in war, to pay tribute, to make a presentation of provisions or property, to pay a formal visit, etc., they went accompanied by their mata-ni-vanua who when near the place would go ahead of them, and seeking out the proper mata-ni-vanua would inform him of their arrival. The latter would then go and report to his chief, who would give him instructions. This mata-ni-vanua would return to the other and instruct him to bring his people into the town, who on arrival would be billeted under the direction of the local mata-ni-vanua. At the appointed time the local chief, and such of his people as were concerned in the matter, would repair to the usual place of assembly and take their seats; then the visitors would file in, led by their mata-ni-vanua and chiefs; these chiefs would sit down in front of the other chiefs with their mata-ni-vanua close by them; then the last-named would move forward a little, in front of his own chiefs and make his speech. (p. 2)

Adding to the debate, the Reverend Arthur Small observed that the office of the matanivanua acted as a gateway between people and chiefs and between the people of different polities. Small agreed with Beauclerc that these men held significant political power and that they should be thought of as ‘representatives’ rather than ‘messengers’ or ‘spokesmen’:

No one has such free access to the chief as he, and certainly no one may speak so boldly to him as the mata-ni-vanua. To all intents and purposes he is the chief’s aide-de-camp. (p. 6)

The veteran 19th century resident and administrator David Wilkinson remarked further that the *matanivanua* was a chief's highest executive officer (Wilkinson, 1908, p. 11). One or more of them was his constant companion. This was because the *matanivanua* was the connecting link between chief and people. He was master of all ceremonies and received all messengers, reported their business to the chief and communicated the chief's orders to the people (Wallis, 1851/1983, p. 71).

The *matanivanua* was also the guardian and trustee of all official historical, cultural, ceremonial, political and land-related knowledge, not just of his own tribe but of other tribes connected by tradition with the chief and people of his village and *vanua* (polity).<sup>1</sup> In Vanua Levu, the *matanivanua* also assumed the powers of dispersing land and adjudicated on all questions or disputes relating to right and occupation. These accrued powers led Wilkinson to liken *matanivanua* to a 'lord of the manor' (pp. 11–12). Yet, unlike the great ceremonies that accompanied the installation of chiefs, the title of *matanivanua* was passed on within the clan with little public pomp.

*Matanivanua* also played a critical mediating role. The Fijian theologian Reverend Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere explained that:

he sets in motion the principle of 'relationship' or relatedness ... He speaks and listens, represents, reconciles, mends broken relationships, negotiates, introduces, announces and so on. Because of this rather alarming list, a *matanivanua* must know his *vanua* inside out. (2002, p. 72)

As mediators, *matanivanua* had the power to preserve the peace. This did not necessarily make them agents of peace. Indeed, they were influential participants in all deliberations including those about making war.

---

1 In its literal sense, the term '*vanua*' means land. However, in its figurative sense, it refers to the people of a particular polity and the world that is encompassed therein.

Rather, they were brokers of war *and* peace, or as Charles Wilkes aptly put it, 'they could make and break wars' (1844/1985, p. 78).

Their capacity to ensure that the land remained at peace can be gauged from a meeting of more than a thousand warriors held in Rewa in April 1839. The purpose of the meeting was to thank the Rewa *bati* (warrior tribes) for services rendered in previous military campaigns. After several speeches had been made by representatives of the assembled tribes, the matanivanua of the Roko Tui Dreketi got up to speak about peace. Reverend John Hunt wrote about it in the following terms:

The speech of the orator called mata ni vanua, that is the 'eye of the land' was all about peace. The King desired them to dwell in peace, and promised if they did so he would reward them for it. Some disturbance was expected, as a Fishing Town was to come and eat with the warriors, which displeased them much, but all was peace. (1839-1841, p. 60, journal entry, April 29, 1839)

Hunt did not divulge any other details of the speech. Nevertheless, when the role of matanivanua is considered in its widest sense, it can be inferred that he mediated the tensions that existed between the assembled tribes. Some Rewan *bati* tribes were known to harbour grudges against each other, and he would have had to draw on the full array of his oratory and diplomatic skills to keep the peace.

It appears that the term 'matanivanua' was foreign to the western and interior parts of Viti Levu. Yet, this does not mean that the position was non-existent. The early 20th-century anthropologist Arthur Maurice Hocart found that in Ba, for instance, heralds were given the title *na tutu*, and that in the chiefly village of Nailaga, the position was held by the Taubere clan, who were *veitacini* (brothers) of the leading clan of Tio. In the interior mountains of Ba, the Nubu tribe used the term *duve* to refer to the person and functions of the matanivanua (Hocart, 1913, p. 112).

Hence, in spite of linguistic differences, the existence of the institution of mediation is undeniable and pervaded the entire archipelago.

While the office of the *matanivanua* was responsible for mediation, another *mata* held the specific function of harmonising relations between different tribal groups. The *mataki* personified a deeply rooted and wide-ranging network of relationships that ran through the entire fabric of Fijian society via the appointment of formal representatives – envoys – by one *vanua* to another. The existence of a *mataki* in a particular *vanua* is proof that, however ancient a treaty, it still existed. The *mataki* clan acted as the keeper and discharger of this treaty (T. Talebulamaijaina, personal communication, February 24, 2022).

Writing about this official in the Lau Group in the 1840s, Williams observed that:

In each island and town under the rule of Lakemba there is an authorised *Mata ki Lakemba*, 'Ambassador to Lakemba,' through whom all the business between that place and the seat of government is transacted. Then again, at Lakemba there is a diplomatic corps, the official title of each individual of which contains the name of the place to which he is messenger, and to which all the King's commands are by him communicated. (1858/1982, p. 27)

Similarly, a *Mataki Bau* was envoy to Bau, a *Mataki Verata* was envoy to Verata, and a *Mataki Burebasaga* was envoy to Rewa. Describing how this system worked in Bau, the German botanist Berthold Seemann explained that:

Each of these states or principalities has its ambassador at Bau (*Mataki Bau*), who, however, does not constantly reside in the capital, but only

when there is any business to transact, which may occasionally last for weeks or months. On arriving at Bau, he takes up his abode at the house of the Bauan 'minister,' if he may be called so, charged with the affairs of the district from which he comes as ambassador, and he is by his host introduced to the King of Fiji. When Bau has any business to transact abroad, the ambassador selected is invariably the minister of the affairs of the district to which he is sent, and his place at the capital is temporarily filled by a relative. The office of these diplomatic agents is hereditary in certain families, and they are appointed by the ruling chiefs. Title and office are quite as much valued as they are in Europe by ourselves, – human nature being human nature all the world over. (p. 76)

Using Verata as an example, the iTaukei scholar, Simione Sevudredre (2014), has specified that the envoys were often kin to the people of the places to which they were accredited. These bonds of kinship worked to establish and promote good relations (62; see also Hocart, 1913; Small, 1915).

In certain instances, the ambassadorial role could be delegated to a particular village within a larger polity. For instance, on the island of Beqa, the title of Matakī Burebasaga (ambassador to Rewa) was held by the people of Lalati village rather than a clan within the chiefly village of Nawaisomo in the vanua of Raviravi (Vatu, 1977). Also, a clan could hold the function of ambassador to two different places. Such is the case of the Mataqali Matarua of Naceva in Beqa, which is Matakī Tui Sawau (envoy to the chief of Sawau), and Matakī Korolevu (envoy to the Vunivalu of Serua) (T. Talebulamajaina, personal communication, February 24, 2022).

In the rare instances where no formal diplomatic pathways existed between two vanua, the diplomacy would transit through a third party. For instance, in pre-Christian times, Natewa and Cakaudrove had no established mataki to mediate between them. Their diplomatic relationship was therefore facilitated by the Mataqali Maretaba of Korocau, who acted as the Mataki Natewa (Eroni Rakuita, Valelevu Clan, Yavusa Sovatabua, Natewa, personal communication, March 9, 2022).

Occasionally, an ambassadorial mission was carried by high-ranking chiefs and became a great social occasion. It would involve much feasting and could be prolonged over several weeks. Visiting delegations might linger among their hosts for such a long time that amorous relationships formed between hosts and visitors. One story tells of a mission conveyed by the Lakeban chief Niumataiwalu to Bau in the mid-1700s during which he fell in love with Adi Davila, a high-ranking woman from the island of Nairai. She had inherited the title 'Adi Levuka' by virtue of her marriage to Ratu Nailatikau, the warlord of Bau. Nailatikau found out about the affair and immediately sent out a black-stoned *tabua* (traditional gift – usually a whale's tooth) as a request to avenge him. *Tabua* were considered invaluable and functioned as a currency that could secure life and death. This particular *tabua* eventually reached Ono-i-Lau where Niumataiwalu had travelled to collect tribute. The unsuspecting young chief was duly killed at Olosega (Brewster, 1937: 45-48). Interestingly, Adi Levuka escaped punishment. As a woman of high rank, her marriage to Nailatikau had itself been an act of diplomacy. Any insult or violence towards her might have risked reprisals from her relatives (Brewster, 1937, p. 47). She lived on to raise a son, Banuve, whose leadership helped propel Bau to the apex of Fijian political and economic power. However, not all high-ranking women were immune from the wrath of their angry or jealous husbands. For instance, Adi Litia, wife of Ratu Namosimalua the leading chief of Viwa, was beaten 'most unmercifully' by her husband for much lesser offences (Wallis,

1851/1983, p. 39; see also Hunt, 1839–1841, p. 33, journal entry, February 18, 1839).

On the Western side of Viti Levu, the chiefly vanua of Vuda produced considerable diplomatic traffic. For instance, an exchange of diplomatic postings existed between Vuda and the seat of the Kalevu (paramount chief) of Nadroga in Cuvu. In this arrangement, the Mata i Vuda took up residence in Nakuruvarua (Cuvu) while a reciprocal appointment was stationed in Vuda through the office of Mata i Nakuruvarua (Parke, 2014, p. 205). Aubrey Parke's research shows that to offset Vuda's numerous diplomatic demands, the ambassadorial responsibilities were shared among different mataqali. The Naciriyawa mataqali was given the responsibility for Nawaka, Sabeto and Ba; the Nasalivakarua for Rewa and Nadroga; while the Navicaki mataqali was responsible for Vitogo (p. 206).<sup>2</sup>

The existence of envoys in the interior of Viti Levu has been documented by the iTaukei anthropologist Asesela Ravuvu (1987). In these districts, the envoy is given the name *kakimata*. For instance, the envoy from the vanua of Nakoidrau in Nagonenicolo to the vanua of Muaira in the next valley, are members of the mataqali Verata. Similarly, the *kakimata* of Muaira to the vanua of Nakoidrau are members of the mataqali Saivou. As Ravuvu explained, the mataqali named Verata and Saivou are said to be *vikakimatani*. In addition to this, the two mataqali are *visalakini* (pathways) through which messages and people are passed from one vanua to the other (1987, p. 20).

The role of specialised clans in the interior of Viti Levu is further illustrated in the relationship between Muaira and the vanua of Noemalu near the headwaters of the Wainimala River. Ravuvu observed that:

When the whole *vanua* of Muaira decides to ceremonially come together with the *vanua* of

---

2 In Sabeto, Parke's informants mentioned diplomatic links with Nadroga, Vuda and Vitogo through representatives titled Mata i Naboutini. See Parke, p. 206.

Noemalu ... its sub-group, the *yavusa* of Naboro will be the envoy or *kakimata* to the Noemalu people. Within the *yavusa* of Naboro itself is a *mataqali* which has been specifically assigned the role of envoy to the *vanua* of Noemalu. When Noemalu decides to go to Muaira for an occasion, its traditionally defined envoy will communicate with its Naboro people who will then direct and take them to the Muaira people (1987, pp. 20–21).

Hence, diplomatic pathways in the rugged and mountainous districts of the interior were just as intricate and refined as they were on the coast and smaller islands.

In their official duties, these envoys were required to receive and provide accommodation for visiting missions. They provided a home away from home for dignitaries who might be visiting from their home *vanua* (Sevudredre, 2014, p. 64; see also Beauclerc, 1915). After the ceremonies of welcome, they delivered the message to the chief(s) and participated in the deliberations. Envoys were also called on to organise and retrieve tribute from subject tribes or islands. For instance, if word was received in Lakeba of the looming arrival of a delegation of Bauan chiefs, the Vatuwaqa clan of Matakia Moce would be sent to that island to order bails of *masi* (cloth) or *magimagi* (sinnet), or some other resource that might be required to host Lakeba's Bauan visitors (Hocart, 1913, p. 115).

Unofficially, and much like modern-day ambassadors, the role of the *matakia* was to represent and advance the interests of their home *vanua*. In this sense, their appointment was as much about encouraging good relations as it was about gathering intelligence and looking for opportunities to maintain or extend influence. For instance, a powerful *vanua* might place one of its clans among a troublesome neighbour that it recently defeated, to act as its ears and eyes and counteract plans for any future trouble. It is believed, for instance, that the Nukulau clan of

Kaba was implanted into the Kaba polity by Cakobau after the Battle of Kaba in 1855 to report any future signs of rebellion.

### **Diplomatic pathways (*sala/calevu*)**

Fijian diplomacy also expressed itself through formal pathways known as *sala* in the east and *calevu ni matamataraki* in the west. These diplomatic pathways had specific names such as the ‘calevu ni Nukuvou’ (Nadi) or the ‘calevu ni Vuse’ (Nadroga). The ‘calevu ni Niubukurua’ (path of the two coconuts tied together) was created between the Naua and Kovacaki people of Nadi when their representatives placed two coconut trees across the Vunaburu River between Buduka and Saravi, and tied them together as a bridge to symbolise their partnership (Parke, 2014, p. 192).

Not all *sala* or *calevu* were intended to promote goodwill. Some existed to formalise tributary relationships and were used to invoke a right to collect payment. They could also be activated to request assistance in war or to invite allies for a visit or *solevu* (feasting). Much of the time, they were used for sending messages of request for trade in goods and services (Parke, 2014, p. 72).

Interestingly, in the west of Viti Levu, smaller polities tended to develop much more extensive networks of *calevu*. For instance, the Noi Navo of Nadi had up to 30 different diplomatic pathways forged with polities in the western part of Viti Levu (Parke, 2014, p. 207). Their initial strategy was to form alliances with nearby polities to secure their immediate perimeter and then to use these as stepping stones to pursue friendly relations with more distant polities.

Parke suggests that this was due to the relative difficulties of smaller polities in forging marriage relationships with more powerful vanua (p. 207). It appears, therefore, that where strategic marriages could not be secured, smaller polities intensified their efforts to create formal diplomatic pathways. Smaller polities also needed to ensure that the

*mata* who personified these connections were highly trained and skilled in diplomacy. The welfare and, on occasion, survival of these tribes depended on it.

An institution named *matekila* or *masekila* also existed among the vanua of Nadroga, Nadi, Sabeto and Vuda. Within this institution, as Hocart (1913) explained, Nadroga and Nadi shared a relationship named Navatukadiri (the chipped stone). Its role in diplomacy was described as follows:

If Nandronga and Nandi are at war, peace is made by the clan of Vunavesi in Nandronga taking whales' teeth to Nandi, or the clan of Navatulevu in Nandi taking whales' teeth to Nandronga; in either case 'their very first word' is Navatukandiri. (Hocart, 1913, p.115)

In the speech that accompanied the presentation of whales' teeth, the envoys of Vunavesi would make specific reference to the traditional connection between the two vanua:

I present this whale's tooth, a small tooth, that you may be gracious, that there be no war, that we may be at peace: long is my speech by the Vatukandiri in Louvatu, o kei a tu. (p. 116)

## Diplomatic venues

Finally, deliberations needed to take place in an appropriate venue. Aside from the *vale levu* (house of the chief), another building used for facilitating and fostering intertribal goodwill was the *burenisa*. This public building was a place where all visitors could be lodged. William Cary (1928/1972) was probably referring to the *burenisa* when he observed in the 1820s that after he and his party stopped in Beqa on their way to Kadavu, they were assigned a house 'calculated for the accommodation

of visitors, with which every village is provided' (p. 49). As a visitor to Natewa in the early 1840s, the beachcomber William Diaper wrote of the *burenisa* as 'a long receiving house built for the purpose of accommodating visitors' (Diaper 1853/1967, p. 433). Meanwhile, the American ornithologist and entomologist, Titian Ramsay Peale, wrote about the *burenisa* in Vutia in Rewa as:

a kind of town hall built at the public expense in which all strangers are lodged, and provisions sent to them. Here all the councils are held, Judgments passed by the chiefs, etc., and a store of arms kept. (Peale, 1838–1842, cited in Poesch, 1961, p. 171)

Meanwhile, when Seemann visited Namosi in 1860, he described the *burenisa* as a large building where men met and travellers could pass the night and obtain meat and drink:

Sunset was close at hand when we reached Nagadi, a town built on the top of a high steep hill, composed of rich clayey soil. For the night, we took up our quarters at the Bure ni sa, or strangers' house, invariably found at every Fijian town or village. (p. 151)

In many places around Fiji, including Bau and Waikava in Cakaudrove, the *burenisa* was the biggest building in the village. In Bau, it measured about 30 m in length (Erskine, 1853/1967, p. 190). Sometimes, it was the only edifice capable of accommodating large delegations.<sup>3</sup>

Before visitors could even get to the *burenisa*, another piece of architecture needed to be passed through. As Sevudredre has pertinently put it, a

---

3 For an image of a *burenisa*, see Figure 22 in Mark Rochette's 2003 article 'On the meaning of *burekalou*' in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 44(1), p. 93.

village could not be entered into randomly (2021). Before approaching the intended village, visitors were briefed about their *matanikatuba*. This was (and still is) a doorway or entrance into a designated *bure* (house) in the village, and visitors of a particular provenance had to pass through it before they could walk in the village and mingle freely with its inhabitants. When the beachcomber William Lockerby (1982) wrote in 1808 that ‘every village has a home for strangers’, he was probably referring to the *matanikatuba* (p. 29).

Not all visitors went through the same *matanikatuba*. Much depended on a visitor’s place of origin and his or her kinship ties with the village being visited. For instance, different islands in the Lau Group had different *matanikatuba* to enter the paramount chiefly village (*vanua vakaturaga*) of Tubou on the island of Lakeba (Tabilai, 2014, p. 171). Hence, different *matanikatuba* existed for people from different parts of the archipelago. On some occasions, the ceremonies of welcome were completed within the *matanikatuba*. On others, the visitors would wait in the *matanikatuba* until a representative (often the *mataki*) would lead the delegation to present their *ai sevusevu* (formal ceremony) to seek acceptance in the village and meet the intended individual, clan or chief. Only then could visitors proceed with their business.

At a more symbolic level, the *matanikatuba* functioned as a gateway into a village and was a widely recognised and respected convention of admission into a ‘foreign’ territorial entity. Its purpose and intent was to mediate between the outside world and the interior of the village. One’s *matanikatuba* then became one’s home away from home – much like an embassy – for the duration of the visit. In this sense, no visitor remained a *vulagi* (stranger) in any part of Fiji. He or she was automatically adopted and absorbed by the home community when he or she passed through the *matanikatuba*.

The physical architecture of pre-Christian diplomacy is an area of research that is worth developing further. In this regard, it appears that

women were often excluded or kept on the margins of these meeting places and could not fully participate in the wide-ranging conversations and negotiations that took place within their walls. That is not to say that women were not active agents in Fijian diplomacy. On the contrary, they found numerous ways to engage meaningfully in diplomacy via formal and informal means (see Nicole, forthcoming).

## Rituals and restoring peace

To restore peace or to prolong it, pre-Christian Fijians marked their intentions with a number of rituals. The most common ritual for the restoration of peace after war was the *i soro*, which was used to atone for causing offence. These ceremonies invariably involved the presentation of *tabua* (whales' teeth). *Tabua* lay at the centre of all diplomatic discussions, negotiations and exchanges because they encompassed the highest symbol of respect, deference, loyalty, goodwill, acceptance, and recognition (Ravuvu, 1987, p. 22). In pre-Christian times, the presentation of *tabua* was often accompanied with a *soro qele* (a basket of earth also known as *kau vanua*), and a woman of rank.

The *soro qele* signified the surrender of the lands (though not a transfer of ownership) by the vanquished until such time that they had paid their penance – usually in the form of the first fruits of future harvests. Surrendering a woman of rank was a significant loss for the conquered tribe and an acquisition of considerable value for the victors. This is because the male offspring of a union between this woman and a chief of the conquering tribe automatically acquired extensive *vasu* privileges among his mother's people and their resources. These symbols of submission and punishment represented the high price to pay for defeat, but they also reflect a mechanism intended to avoid prolonged warfare and to allow the resolution of conflicts with minimal loss of life.

Aside from *i soro*, other rituals were also used to restore peace. One such ritual was *i bulubulu* or the burying of resentment after a conflict. Horatio

Hale, the ethnographer and philologist on the United States Exploring Expedition of 1840 listed *bulubulu* (peace-offering) as one of the key words in his short Fijian–English dictionary (Hale, 1846/1968, p. 401). Oral accounts recorded by Native Lands Commission in Rakiraki in the early part of the 20th century recalled the performance of this ceremony by the chief Naereere to the leaders of all the villages of Rakiraki as a peace-offering for the bad blood that had flowed between them (see Parke, 2014, p. 103). Another ritual was the *qusi ni loaloa*, or the wiping of a dark spot in acknowledgement of a debt that one party owed to another (Tuimaleali‘ifano et al., 2024, p. 8).

Among the rituals that helped to lengthen periods of peace were the festive occasions known as *solevu*. These were designed for exchange but also to celebrate and strengthen goodwill between two or more communities. Numerous early visitors commented about these grand occasions and about the massive investment in time and resources that they represented. Recounting one such occasion in Natewa, Diaper wrote:

After I had been there a little while, a ‘so levu levu’ (a show of property and making of presents) was proposed, and ambassadors to each government were sent to invite them to visit Natewa [*sic*] in so many days for that purpose, and likewise to discuss national affairs. I observed they had each a quantity of sticks of different lengths, which were taken for the purpose of assisting the memory, to treat upon; and according to the importance of the subject they had the sticks long or short. (1853/1967, p. 432)

Addressing the guests of Natewa, the host matanivanua spoke of his ‘extreme’ happiness that all parties had met in such an amicable way and that he hoped that this meeting would be ‘the means of cementing them

together in eternal friendship' (p. 432). He explained that the people of Natewa had worked 'day and night' to make *masi* for their guests as a token of 'their good will and desire for peace' and of their chief's appreciation and desire for peace (p. 432). The speech was followed by the exchange of numerous *tabua* 'backwards and forwards' between the attending parties. Massive feasting, entertainment and fraternisation – or diplomacy by feasting – would generally follow the exchange of gifts, to further celebrate the bonds of friendship. As might be expected, it took months or even years to plan these occasions. This enormous effort reveals the determination and eagerness that these communities shared about nurturing their relationships and about the importance they placed on staying on good terms with each other.

### Special communal relationships

While a specific system of diplomacy and rituals helped to mediate conflicts and prolong periods of peace, a more extensive network of traditional relationships also contributed to forge peaceful relations between communities and complicate who could go to war with whom. Fijian communities are conspicuous for creating relationships with each other. As Unaisi Nabobo-Baba has aptly put it, 'all Fijians are related – whether directly in genealogical terms or via marriage or other relations that are marked by kinship terms' (2015, p. 27).

'Other relations' means the myriad of relational arrangements that were institutionalised from ancient times and continue to be recognised by all in the present. They include for instance, the *mataqali* relationship shared between the people of Tailevu and Ra and the people of Verata and Rewa; the *dreu* relationship between the people of Nadroga/Navosa and the people of Vanua Levu; the *yanu* bond between the inhabitants of outer islands; the *tauvu* connection between the Kadavu and Nadroga (also Nadi, Yasawa and Ra), between Nayau and Noco, or between Gau and Vanua Levu; and the *ramarama* relationship between the people of Verata and Naitasiri. Nabobo-Baba mentions the *veitabuki* relationship

of respect between the people of Vugalei and Verata, and the playful yet competitive *veitabani* relationship between the Vugalei people and those of Wainibuka. Meanwhile, the people of Nakorovau, Yaumali and Koroba in Nadi shared a *veitacini* relationship. As we saw earlier, the polities of the interior of Viti Levu were joined by Vikakimatani relationships. The people of Nakorosule in Nagonicolo in the interior of Viti Levu share the traditional Yasayasa relationship with the people of Moala in the Lau Group (A. Ravuvu, personal communication, February 23, 2022). Within Moala itself, each village is linked to the others in a net of social and political ties that were constructed over several centuries (Sahlins, 1962, p. 375). Each of these special relationships implies there was successful diplomatic enterprise prior to contact with Europe and Christianity. All of them deserve greater discussion than is possible here. The least that can be surmised is that in their cumulative effect, they forged a complex complementarity and mutuality that simultaneously strengthened bonds of peace and complicated war.

In this regard, a lesson plan about traditional relationships published on its website by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs in the early 2020s (n.d.), affirmed that tribes connected by *tauvu* bonds could not go to war with one another. This is because of the sacred ancestral bonds that existed between them. Implicit in this view is the proposition that kinship ties acted as a deterrent to war and could override factors that threatened to disturb the peace between two polities such as political ambition or economic expediency. The lesson plan provides no archival evidence to support its assertion but opens up an interesting avenue of study that calls for future investigation.

## Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that in pre-Christian Fiji, a culture of peace and conflict resolution evolved and coexisted alongside war. Periods of peace were shored up and fortified by a highly intricate system of diplomacy. This system flourished and ensured that

pre-Christian Fijians could enjoy frequent and prolonged periods of peace. It also meant that they had the means to avoid armed conflict, or when necessary, that they could bring these conflicts to a speedy conclusion with minimal loss of life. In this environment, iTaukei communities could occupy themselves in numerous ways other than preparing for and making war.

Furthermore, numerous rituals existed to variously encourage goodwill, to keep the peace, to rectify wrong, to demand accountability, to ask for and obtain forgiveness, and to resolve conflicts. These customs predated the moral influence of Christianity and were thus longstanding, authentic, indigenous forms of making and keeping the peace. Pre-Christian Fijians also created complex layers of relationships within and between kin groups, and these relationships allowed for bonds of peace to be strengthened and simultaneously complicated the likelihood of war.

These aspects of pre-Christian Fiji are worth valorising and bringing into conversations about present-day politics. However, one must also guard against laundering Fiji's history of the violent episodes that iTaukei often collectively remember as *na gauna ni valu* (the age of warfare). Pre-Christian Fijian society was not an Edenic peace-loving society but neither were the European societies that claimed to bring peace and enlightenment to the islands. The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that warfare took place in spite of the existence of an extensive apparatus of peace. This apparatus of peace itself could be oppressive, especially when it was utilised to reinforce the existing structures of power that benefited the leading families and their vanua. Moreover, diplomacy was sometimes used to cause war rather than to prevent it. This convoluted space between war and peace deserves further investigation, particularly from scholars who have access to the *tukutuku raraba* (tribal oral histories) and other such oral sources.

In the end, Ratu Lewenilovo's statement about Fijians knowing 'no peace' may have held some truth in the specific political context that

characterised Somosomo and several other polities of Fiji in the 1840s. However, his statement reflects poorly on the wide array of instruments that he and other Fijians could and did call on to resolve their conflicts. The examples used in this chapter suggest that pre-Christian Fijians knew peace, that they valued it, that they knew how to preserve it, and that they possessed the means to recover it when it was lost. It would seem, therefore, that despite its constant ebbs and flows, the ocean could also deliver calmness and peace.

## References

- Brewster, A. B. (1937). *King of the cannibal isles*. Robert Hales and Company.
- Beauclerc, G. A. F. W. (1915). Fijian heralds and envoys. *Transactions of the Fijian Society*, 195, 1–3.
- Cary, W. (1972). *Wrecked on the Feejees*. Ye Galleon Press. (Original work published 1928)
- Cretton, V. (2005). Traditional Fijian apology as a political strategy. *Oceania*, 75(4), 403–417. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.2005.tb02899.x>
- Diaper, W. (1967). Jackson's narrative. Appendix in John Elphinstone Erskine, *Journal of a cruise among the islands of the Western Pacific*. Dawsons of Pall Mall. (Original work published 1853)
- Erskine, J. E. (1967). *Journal of a cruise among the islands of the Western Pacific*. Dawsons of Pall Mall. (Original work published 1853)
- France, P. (1969). *The charter of the land: Custom and colonization in Fiji*. Oxford University Press.
- Hale, H. (1968). *United States exploring expedition during the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842: Ethnography and philology* (Vol. 6). The Gregg Press. (Original work published 1846)

- Hocart, A. M. (1913). Fijian heralds and envoys. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 43, 109–118. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2843163>
- Hunt, J. (1846). *Memoir of William Cross*. John Mason.
- Hunt, J. (1839–1841). *Private journal* (Vol. 1). Records of the Methodist Missionary Society of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, London.
- Lockerby, W. (1982). *The journal of William Lockerby: Sandalwood trader in the Feejee Islands, 1808–1809*. Fiji Times.
- Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. (n.d.). Na veiwekani vakavanua [Traditional relationships] [Lesson plan]. Retrieved April 23, 2023, from [http://www.itaukeiaffairs.gov.fj/images/TILC\\_EDUCATION/NA\\_VEIWEKANI\\_VAKAVANUA\\_1.pdf](http://www.itaukeiaffairs.gov.fj/images/TILC_EDUCATION/NA_VEIWEKANI_VAKAVANUA_1.pdf)
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (2005). *Vugalei: Voices and silences of what and how we know: Indigenous Fijian epistemology and implications for education* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. University of Auckland.
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (2015). The mutual implication of kinship and chiefship in Fiji. In C. Toren & S. Pauwels (Eds.), *Living kinship in the Pacific* (pp. 15–35). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qctd3.5>
- Parke, A. (2014). *Degei's descendants: Spirits, place and people in pre-cession Fiji*. ANU Press. <https://doi.org/10.22459/ta41.08.2014>
- Pauwels, S. (2015). The vasu position and the sister's man: The case of Lau, Fiji. In C. Toren & S. Pauwels (Eds.), *Living kinship in the Pacific* (pp. 143–165). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qctd3.11>
- Poesch, J. (1961). *Titian Ramsay Peale, 1799–1885, and his journals of the Wilkes expedition*. The American Philosophical Society.

- Rawalai, L. (2020, October 25). The masters of the seas. *Fiji Times*. <https://www.fjitymes.com/the-masters-of-the-seas/>
- Rochette, M. (2003). On the meaning of burekalou, aka 'model spirit house' from Fiji. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 44(1), 70–98.
- Ravuvu, A. (1987). *The Fijian Ethos*. Institute of Pacific Studies.
- Sahlins, M. D. (1962). *Moala: Culture and nature on a Fijian island*. The University of Michigan Press.
- Sevudredre, S. (2014). Verata traditional envoys and the importance of representation. In S. Lee, U. Nabobo-Baba, L. L. Kinikini-Kauvaka, & F. Rehuher-Marugg (Eds.), *Traditional knowledge and wisdom: Themes from the Pacific Islands* (pp. 60–68). Jeonju.
- Sevudredre, S. (2021, October 25). [Facebook post]. Facebook. No longer available online. Retrieved April 23, 2023, from <https://m.facebook.com/groups/302612704796652/permalink/420972539627334/>
- Small, A. J. (1915). Fijian heralds and envoys [Response to Beauclerc]. *Transactions of the Fijian Society*, 3–7.
- Tabilai, W. (2014). *The iTaukei mata system of knowing* [Unpublished M.A. thesis]. University of the South Pacific.
- Toren, C. (1999). *Mind, materiality and history: Explorations in Fijian ethnography*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203982006>
- Tuimaleali'ifano, A. E. M., Sakai, S., Rakuira, E., & Rakuira, T. (2024). *Bridging the divides and healing the vanua. The role of the tukutuku raraba in the history of Fijians and the importance of critical review in modern Fiji. The example from the succession to the Vunivalu title of the yavusa Sovatabua, Natewa*. University of the South Pacific.
- Tuwere, I. S. (2002). *Vanua: Towards a Fijian theology of place*. Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

- Vatu, S. (1977). [Collection of recorded Fijian oral history (Rewa) (T. Talebulamaijaina, Trans.)]. Fiji Museum.
- Wallis, M. (1983). *Life in Feejee, or, five years among the cannibals by a lady*. Fiji Museum. (Original work published 1851)
- Wallis, M. (1994). *The Fiji and New Caledonia journals of Mary Wallis: 1851–1853* (D. Routledge, Ed.). Institute of Pacific Studies.
- Wilkes, C. (1985). *Narrative of the United States exploring expedition*, Vol. 3. Fiji Museum. (Original work published 1844)
- Wilkinson, D. (1908). Origin of the Fijian race. In *Transactions of the Fijian Society*, 7–17.
- Williams, T. (1931). *The journal of Thomas Williams: Missionary in Fiji, 1840–1853* (G. Henderson, Ed.). Angus & Robertson.
- Williams, T. (1982). *Fiji and the Fijians. Vol. 1: The islands and their inhabitants*. Fiji Museum. (Original work published 1858)



# 4

## **Reconnecting the heartlands of Ocean-Pacifika through salutations:**

*Ai cavuti, fa'alupega, fakatāpū*

ATO'ESE MORGAN TUIMALEALI'IFANO & PAUL D'ARCY

Pacific Islanders have explored, developed and nurtured their island homes for millennia. Regular community interactions involving sophisticated diplomatic protocols were a fundamental part of Pacific peoples' success in this process. However, modern academic scholarship borne out of Western disciplines, colonial tactics to secure political control through indirect rule, and post-independence nation-building agendas, have tended to emphasise economic exchanges and political alliances over social protocols, customs and other, more nuanced, political relationships. This is because these features were more readily observable in the archaeological record or evident to European outsiders lacking intimate familiarity with the inner cultural logic of Pacific societies. This chapter argues that reconnecting the heartlands

of Ocean-Pacifika is about reconnecting the heart to place and people – families of belonging, near and far – through enduring institutions rooted in respect. Salutations and ceremonial greetings are ancestral devices that provide the means by which peoples' hearts are approached, and perhaps mended and reconnected.

For many millennia, Pacific Islanders' history was recorded and conveyed orally. The transition from a preliterate to a literate state took barely 200 years. This simple fact plus the unrelenting role of European missionaries in influencing this transition should not be underestimated nor passed over lightly. The impact of this phenomenal literacy revolution on indigenous cultures is still playing out (Tuimaleali'ifano & D'Arcy, 2023, pp. 281–282). Despite over 200 years of exposure to the Western logos, for the vast number of Pacific Islanders, order and control is mediated through the spoken word. The eminent Pacific historian J.W. Davidson asserted that 'indigenous cultures were like islands whose coastal regions outsiders might penetrate but whose heartlands they could never conquer' (Davidson, 1970, p. 267). While Western social and economic institutions and ideology greatly reshaped Pacific societies, family, village and tribal values were not wholly destroyed, and many of the value judgements made about everyday matters is processed through the unwritten prisms of custom and tradition.

This has meant that Pacific history has had to become multidisciplinary to incorporate non-literate sources such as oral traditions, linguistic patterns and material remains. As part of the ongoing decolonisation of Pacific history, this chapter documents one aspect of oral tradition that has hitherto been neglected, namely the salutations and ceremonial greetings between Samoa, Tonga and Fiji.

This neglect in the official government and academic record is fortunately not repeated in community memory. In Samoa, the first printed records of Samoa's salutations were made by the London Missionary Society mission, followed by the Methodist and Catholic churches.

The government only became involved almost a hundred years later in 2004, and it issued a second edition in 2013. The Mormon church has published extensively on oral history and traditions, but the authors have yet to see a Mormon publication dedicated to village salutations. The salutations for Samoan and Fijian villages are published and appear on websites, as are salutations for Tongan royalty, *nopele* (nobles) and common people, but salutations for Tongan villages are not.

This chapter argues that the persistence of these ancient protocols into the present reflects a 'heartland' that is in transition between pre-literate and literate worlds, and the central role of salutations is to represent and reinforce a political hierarchy that is also in transition. Hierarchy and salutation are mediated by genealogies that form the contested memories of what constitutes legitimacy and authority. We argue that the persistence of this heartland calls for a re-evaluation of the nature of Pacifica diplomacy to greater emphasise consistent and respectful recognition of local traditions vested in ancestral titles through salutations and other protocols. We conclude that such salutations – known in Bauan Fijian as *ai cavuti*, in Samoan as *fā'alupega* and in Tongan as *fakatāpū* – play a vital role in easing the social transition and in reconnecting the hearts and minds of the region.

## **Fluid regional relations and enduring diplomatic protocols**

The persistence of salutations, in form and delivery, speaks to their effectiveness across generations of traditional history in which power oscillated and fluctuated among the three societies. While modern interpretations vary slightly, even within each society, there is broad national agreement. Throughout their long, interconnected histories, the reinstatement of local rulers would seem to indicate that foreign rulers had withdrawn from the scene, but the following examples, mostly from Samoa, demonstrate that they did not leave altogether. As in other civilisations, leading families in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji had intermarried, and through dynastic marriages, those with foreign ancestry remained

and mediated the transitions. As former rulers of mixed descent with loyal retainers, they were acknowledged with salutations.

In Samoa, for example, Tonga's temporarily displaced paramount titleholder, the Tu'i Tonga, stayed as a guest instead of returning to Tonga. This is evident in the *fā'alupega* of Saina village in the district of Faleata. This reveals deep historical connections. The word is a contraction of a phrase, pronounced Sā-i-inā, and literally means 'it is forbidden in there', a reference to a piece of land that was prohibited because it was the residence of the Tu'i Tonga (Mālō o Sāmoa, 2013, p. 138). That Tongan rulers were living in Samoa, often as refugees from civil wars in Tonga, has been documented by Niel Gunson (1990).

Sā-i-inā's full salutation may provide some pointers:

*Afio mai 'oe Faletaogo, le alo ole Tuitoga*

(Welcome to Faletaogo, the son of the King of Tonga)

*Susu mai 'oulua tulafale o Motuapua'a ma Lauati*

(Welcome to you, the two orators Motuopua'a and Lauati)

*Afio mai 'oe le 'Āiga Sā Ta'alaua*

(Welcome to your lineage of Sā Ta'alaua)

Sā-i-inā's *fā'alupega* references the high-born son, orators and political family of the Tu'i Tonga. The political family is Sā Ta'alaua, a cognate of the Tu'i Ha'atakalaua line, the second to the senior line, the Tu'i Tonga. The village orators are Motuopua'a and Lauati, cognates of the principal Tongan *matāpule* (orator) titles, Motuopuaka and Lauaki, associated with the contemporary Tu'i Kanokupolu title and monarch. The current Tongan monarchy and its leading *matāpule* have Samoan roots. The first Tu'i Kanokupolu titleholder, the junior of the three ruling lines, and Motu'opuaka, his principal *matāpule*, are connected to the family of 'Ama and the 'Āiga Sa Tunumafono, acknowledged as the *'āiga malosi*

(strong family) of Sāfata. Although most Tongans would be horrified by the thought, it is not too far-fetched to suggest that the current royal Tongan line is Samoan and has been so since the 16th century when Ngata, one of the sons of a Tu'i Ha'atakalaua and a Samoan woman, defeated his father and older brother, seized power and assumed the position of *hau* (protector) of the Tu'i Tonga monarchy, thus becoming the most powerful war lord. Samoan traditions also acknowledge a significant Fijian presence in the large Samoan island of Savai'i prior to Tongan dominance in 900 CE. Three districts trace their names to a Fijian, sometimes referred to as Tui Laucala, and his three children. The district of Matāutu is named after his son Utu; Sātaua after another son, Taua; and Sālega after his daughter Lega (Faatonu & Western Samoa Ministry for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, 1998, p. 57).<sup>1</sup>

In Fiji between 1888 and 1965, the Native Lands Commission collected oral evidence under oath about the migration history, and genealogy of the ruler, of each *yavusa* (tribe). This was to satisfy the British rulers' untested assumption that every clan or tribe must be living on land that they 'own'. The information collected ossified a once highly mobile population and fluid social system in the administration's mistaken belief that each iTaukei (indigenous inhabitants) belongs to a landowning clan. And so clans were labelled and registered, and where they did not exist, they were created in order to distinguish their landowning units. In gathering these oral traditions in written form, vestiges of once-foreign occupants were uncovered. The statements included the *mataqali* Toga (a clan for Tongans mainly in Lau) and *mataqali* or *matai* Lemaki (for Samoans from Manono in Kabara and Fulanga). These foreigners were not merely temporary guests brought in to tip the scales in local disputes. In 1843, Tuikilakila, a Tui Cakau aspirant, crossed Taveuni to Vanua Levu to attack tribal garrisons based in Buca and Loa. He defeated both garrisons and left behind his *se ni valu* (remnants of tribal warriors) as

---

1 The district of Safotu is also of Fijian origin, linked to a Fijian lady called Fotuosamoa.

vanguards. The *se ni valu* were made up of Tongans, Futunans, Samoans and people of Korocau, Tunuloa and Taveuni. They stayed in Buca and Loa, and later spread to Natewa (Rakuita et al., 2024, p. 129).

In Tonga, the super-arching title of Tu'i Kanokupolu is the only ancient title that is conferred before the modern ceremony marking the crowning of the Tongan monarch. In the Tu'i Kanokupolu installation ceremony, two ancient Samoan and Fijian connections are invoked. The first is an age-old Samoan mat that accompanies the installation, the mat connecting the Samoan origin of the Tu'i Kanokupolu title with the 'Ama family in Lotofagā, in the district of Sāfata. These connections are maintained during interstate visits, family funerals and celebrated through intermarriages.<sup>2</sup>

The second connection is through an old Tongan marital practice where high-born Tongan females seek Fijian spouses. One such marriage was to a Fijian called Tapuosi, and at the installation ceremony, Tapuosi's role is to keep a watchful eye on proceedings. These symbolic cultural practices celebrate the connections as expressed through the salutations, but they can also be employed to subvert the status quo. For example, former Samoan Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi recalled attending a regional meeting with the Dr Siu Langi Kavaliku of Tonga. At the meeting, the region stood united on an issue, but at the last minute, a call from the palace led to Tonga standing down. Over coffee, Tuila'epa quizzed Kavaliku on the sudden turn of events. Kavaliku's response was most unexpected. He said, 'the problem with Tonga is that it is ruled by foreigners' (Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, personal communication, January 2025).

---

2 Reverend Denny Epati and Reverend Feata Perelini, personal communication, May 10, 2025, Lotofagā, Sāfata. A family descendant, Alapapa 'Ama, informed [Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano] that during the funerals of the last two 'Ama titleholders, the Tongan royal family sent delegations. One case of intermarriage includes Tongan 'Ama descendant, Sione, who married Sāmoan Kaisarina and returned to Tonga.

One of the four constituent titles of the highest office in Samoa, the Tafa'ifā, was Tamasoālī'i, which was controlled by two powerful groups, Sā Tunumafono and Le Alataua, in the district of Sāfata in southern Upolu. The two were at war over control of the Tamasoali'i title and Le Alataua, led by 'Ama, was defeated (Kramer-Verhaaren, 1994, p. 304).<sup>3</sup> Sā Tunumafono won and 'Ama and his party escaped and found refuge in Tongatapu. While biding their time to avenge their defeat, the refugees contracted an important marriage between 'Ama's daughter Tohuia and Mounga-o-Tonga, the sixth Tu'i Ha'atakalaua, at Tatakamotonga, Tongatapu (Ilaiu, 2019).<sup>4</sup> From this marriage, the Tu'i Kanokupolu dynasty emerged under Taufa'ahau to challenge and defeat Laufilitonga, the last holder of the powerful and pre-eminent Tu'i Tonga office, to rule Tonga.

This Samoan-centred narrative points to Western Polynesia as a group of islands highly vulnerable to foreign intrusion. Being relatively isolated from the main Samoan islands to its west, Manu'a occupied a pivotal role as the centre of a wider regional connection, as acknowledged from Polynesian traditions in Fiji through to the Cook Islands. The rulers of Manu'a, the Tui Manu'a, were almost certainly Fijians. Within the Manu'a group, on the island of Ta'ū was a Fijian Tui Manu'a called Fiti'aumua (Fiji the foremost), who relocated the official residence of the ruler from the coastal region inland to Fiti-i-uta (Fiji-in-land). Whether these were the same Fijians that intervened in Savai'i and influenced the establishment of a deity and healer in Fagamalo, known as Tui Fiti, awaits a researcher (Tuimaleali'ifano & D'Arcy, 2023, p. 290).

Regional traditions note that Manu'a's primacy in all of Samoa was subsequently followed by Fijian and then Tongan primacy. Samoan

---

3 See also Ilaiu, 2019, p.138. The possibility of a defection to lead Le Alataua has not been considered. But in the fa'alupega of Lotofagā, Lotofagā constitutes one of the four villages of the Sā Tunumafono polity and its paramount title and commander in chief is 'Ama (Kramer, 1901/1994, p. 308).

4 See also Gunson, 1990.

chiefs then regained sovereignty and consolidated power over their home islands by balancing chiefly power relations. Finally, Tongan chiefs once more asserted themselves regionally, this time largely in eastern Fiji on the eve of Western imperialism. The ceremonial salutations make clear the degree of interaction interwoven into the histories of Samoa, Tonga and Fiji before colonial boundaries created artificial lines across the sea, lines that did not recognise and facilitate these ancient connections.

Despite this rich traditional record, some Samoan *tulafale* (orators versed in traditional history) have played down the past prominence of their Fijian and Tongan neighbours since postcolonial independence, due to the unfortunate belief that it undermines their domestic political agenda and the narrative conveyed in their society's proud history. Yet the Fijian and Tongan engagement in Samoa's past is crystal clear in the oral record, as is the Samoan and Fijian presence in the Tongan record. The Samoan presence beyond Samoa is still largely depicted as being at the behest of Tongan chiefs in the role of mercenaries, as were Niueans, Futunans, Uveans and possibly Rotumans on occasion (Stair, 1897, pp. 271–286).<sup>5</sup> Samoans were also renowned as *mataisau*, the name for a clan of skilled carpenters who relocated to the Lau Islands in eastern Fiji to be near to the source of *vesi* (*Intsia bijuga*) wood favoured for large canoe hulls (Vunidilo, 2023). Tongans and Fijians both resonate equally in Samoan *fā'alupega* (the naming of chiefly titles); for example, the *fā'alupega* of Sa-i-ina village as noted above in the district of Faleata is Tongan in recognition of Tongan presence in Samoa (Gunson, cited in Tuimaleali'ifano & D'Arcy, 2023, fn. 56). From Tonga's view, Fijians and Samoans figure prominently in its past, most prominently in the traditions associated with installing the Tu'i Kanokupolu; and from Fiji's viewpoint, Samoans (and others such as Niueans, Futunans and Uveans) formed part of Tongan forays into Fiji mainly via the Lau islands, the

---

5 The chapter draws from a 42-page manuscript, 'The history of the peopling of Rarotonga: with the generations of the people of Samoa, whence they sprang' by a Rarotongan. It clearly shows the extent of colonisation, largely from Savai'i of Eastern Polynesia and beyond.

widely known one being the *matai* Lemaki in Kabara and Fulanga in Southern Lau.

The more this rich corpus of traditional memory is added to modern Pacific histories, the more it will decolonise the Pacific from being an ocean of anthropological otherness in which another Western form of knowledge creation sought hegemony over how to define what historian of Latin America Eric Wolf (2010) described as the 'people without history'. What Wolf means by this is people who conveyed history between generations orally and by other means. In the Samoan context this includes the production and exchange of *ʻie tōga* (finely woven Samoan mats) with historical relations recorded in their woven patterns (Tcherkézoff, 2002, 2012). But what is also needed is to write history that reflects the values and objectives of local communities, as Epeli Hau'ofa and others attempted over 50 years ago. Such values are reflected in the respect and acknowledgement of local sovereignty inherent in all salutations and ceremonial greetings discussed here.<sup>6</sup>

## Cultural context and diplomatic efficacy of salutations

These ceremonial salutations are intoned and infuse the event with a cultural context. The ambience contrived is one of solemnity, sanctity and authority. It is difficult not to be impressed by the mastery of weaving oratory, images and history. The form and structure of these chants chart the customary land and seascape, and highlight ancient hierarchy, reminiscent of heartlands that foreigners could never conquer (Davidson, 1970, p. 267). The sentiments the chants evoke are of kin-centred heartlands, a common and shared past and what they may foreshadow of the future (Fry, 2019).

---

6 On the consistent recognition of local sovereignty, see Hau'ofa (1994) and Bambridge, D'Arcy and Mawyer (2021).

## Form

Given the central importance of the relationships that salutations enable and their puzzling absence from modern Pacific scholarship, it is important to outline the salutations and how they are expressed.

In Fiji, salutations are broadly referred to as *ai cavuti*, also written as *i cavuti*. The lexicographer Capell (1984) does not include this word in his dictionary. Instead, *i cavuti* appears under the word *cavu*, which means ‘to pronounce a name’. Capell defines *i cavuti* as:

(1) a title: i cavuti vakavanua; (2) the tribal title, the name by which a group of people is known; (3) a totem, one of fish, animal or birds which form the Fijian series of linked totems. (Capell, 1984, p. 28)

In Samoa, ceremonial salutations are referred to as *fā’alupega*. Milner’s lexicography of Samoan (1966, p. 116) defines *fā’alupega* as ‘Ceremonial style and address of a person or social group customarily associated with an area.’ Recent discussions among Samoans on Facebook noted that such a style and address usually include a specific reference to the most important titles of kin groups in strict order of precedence (Faalupega O Samoa, n.d.).<sup>7</sup>

In Tonga, the equivalent term is *fakatāpū* or *fakatāpūtapu*. *Fakatāpūtapu* is defined in Churchward’s lexicography of Tongan as ‘to express respect for those present’ (Churchward, 1959, pp. 104–105), while *faka’apa’apa* is defined as ‘to do homage or obeisance (to kin); to show deference or respect or courtesy, to be deferential or courteous’ (Churchward, 1959, p. 128).

---

7 Websites: <http://gatoloai.fortunecity.ws/id26.htm>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aua,\\_American\\_Samoa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aua,_American_Samoa) (origin of the Launiu na saelua salutation. It includes the legend of the defeat of Tuife’ai, son of Tuifiti and daughter of Mālietoa, by Sāmoans from Upolu.) Accessed 20 November 2022.

## Expression

The salutations are most effective when expressed in the local vernacular and through face-to-face contact. In recent times, the orator is often accompanied by a translator. Non-indigenous speakers wishing to take part often memorise the salutations of the parties involved and recite them in a formal meeting and/or exchange. One such recitation was a speech by a New Zealand National Party member of parliament Greg Fleming in a 2024 parliamentary session debating a bill to reinstate the right of Samoans born before 1948 to become New Zealand citizens. His speech peppered with Samoan and others in Maori were fully reciprocated by an appreciative audience who responded with hymns and prayers in the parliamentary gallery.<sup>8</sup> Salutations are regularly intoned inside churches to either introduce and welcome visitors or to honour the congregation and Atua before delivering homilies and sermons. When Samoa's recently appointed Catholic archbishop Fr Mosese Vitolio Tui<sup>9</sup> delivers homilies, he often intones the relevant salutation before continuing in both English and Samoan languages without worrying about translation.

## Fiji/Viti salutations (*ai cavuti*)

Fiji's modern administrative structure is a British construct introduced for the purpose of governing the colony; Fiji was divided into 15 provinces, 195 districts and 1,193 villages (France, 1969).<sup>10</sup> This structure also recognised national-level chiefs associated with three pre-colonial *matanitu* (kingdoms): Burebasaga, Kubuna and Tovata.

The following examples refer to both older Fijian roles such as foreign warrior, as well as incorporating the Indo-Fijian community,

---

8 <https://videos.parliament.nz/on-demand?id=76f68511-14d5-4d45-1dbf-08dd097c78b9> accessed 9 Sept. 2025.

9 Archbishop Fr Mosese Vitolio Tui was appointed in August 2024, in Le'auva'a, Samoa.

10 Examples of the *ai cavuti* of each village district chief can be viewed at <https://www.fiji-budget-vacations.com/provinces-of-fiji.html>.

demonstrating the ongoing relevance and appeal of ancestral values and the flexibility of the system to incorporate new elements in a fluid society. For example, in order to accommodate the Tongan prince/chief Enele Ma'afu<sup>11</sup> into the newly established assembly of Fijian chiefs in 1866, the title Tui Lau (paramount chief of Lau) was created for him. This adaptation and flexibility is reflected in the following contemporary salutation recited at almost all national events.

*Vua na Turaga na Tui Kaba na Vunivalu na Matanitu o Kubuna*

(Hail/welcome/respect to the titled chief, war lord/expert of war [Tui Kaba and Vunivalu] and Kingdom of Kubuna)

*Vua na Marama Bale na Roko Tui Dreketi na Vunivalu. Na Matanitu o Burebasaga.*

(Hail/welcome/respect to the titled lady chief [Roko Tui Dreketi], war lord/expert in war [Vunivalu] and Kingdom of Burebasaga)

*Vua na Turaga na Tui Cakau, na Matanitu o Tovata*

(Hail/welcome/respect to the titled chief, war lord/expert in war [Tui Cakau] and Kingdom of Tovata)

Alternative:

*Vua na Bui ni Masi e va, na Matanitu o Tovata*

(Hail/welcome/respect to the four titled chiefs [Tui Cakau, Tui Lau/Tui Nayau, Tui Bua, Tui Macuata] and Kingdom of Tovata)

---

11 Son of Aleamotu'a, the reigning Tu'i Kanokupolu in the 1840s.

The alternative phrase to Tovata is 'respect to the four (*vua na bui ni masi e va*) chiefs' and refers to the northern districts of Bua, Macuata, Cakaudrove and Lau. In 2017, a new phrase was created by Rewan chiefs to acknowledge Fiji's Indo-Fijian people. While it referred specifically to the memory of the Indian indentured labourers who died as a consequence of a ship wrecked on Nasilai Reef in 1884, the phrase has been used at the national level to include the Indo-Fijian community in the national salutation of Fiji over the last eight years. The chief of the area, Turaga na Tui Noco, Ratu Isoa Damudamu, created the salutation, which was endorsed by his paramount chief, Na Marama Bale, Roko Tui Dreketi, Ro Teimumu Tuisawau-Kepa (Baleilevuka, 2017).

The full salutation for Fiji's Indo-Fijians is: *Vua na Luvedra na Ratu* (Hail/welcome to the children of the chief).

### **Samoan salutations (*fa'alupega*)**

Samoan *fa'alupega* recognises about 47 districts and 330 villages. As with the Fijian form, they are adaptable according to audience, circumstances and the purpose, acknowledging connections forged through wars and peace. The lines of the four paramount chiefdoms all stem from a woman – the first Tafa'ifā (monarch equivalent) to hold all four sacred pāpā titles<sup>12</sup> – whose father was Tui A'ana Tamalelagi and mother was Vaeitoefaga, the daughter of Tu'i Tonga Fakaulufanua (Kramer-Verhaaren, 1994).

This is the national salutation of Samoa.

*Tulouna Tama ma Latou Āiga*  
(Welcome, royal sons and their royal lineages)

---

12 Tui Atua, Tui A'ana, Gatoa'itele and Tamasoali'i. Once collected (the heads or scalps), the victor is enthroned as Tafa'ifā.

*Tulouna Pule ma Tumua*

(Welcome, elite orator groups) [*Tulouna Pule-e-ono*  
(for six groups) used in Savai'i and *Tumua* for three  
groups in Upolu]

*Tulouna Itū'au ma Alataua*

(Welcome, leaders and vanguards of war in Savai'i and  
Upolu)

*Tulouna Āiga ile Tai ma le Va'a o Fonoti*

(Welcome, families in the sea [Manono and Apolima]  
and the naval fleet of Fonoti [the bay district of  
Fagaloa])

**American Samoa or Eastern Samoa***Tulouna Sua ma le Vaifanua*

(Welcome, Eastern Districts [e.g. Le'iato])

*Fofo ma Itulagi*

(Titles of Western districts [e.g. the title of Tuitele])

*Sā'ole ma Sālē'aumua*

(Orator groups)

*Launiu na Saelia,*

(Villages of Fagatogo and 'Āua [which had been  
occupied by Tuife'ai, a Fijian Samoan])

*Tama a le Manu'atele ma le to'oto'o ole fu'a*

(Royal son of Great Manu'a [Tui Manu'a] and elite  
orator chiefs)

Reciting the salutations for Samoa and American Samoa at national events such as independence and flag-raising ceremonies conveys a

powerful message to the world that although they are different in political and economic orientation, they are historically and culturally one people.

### **Tongan salutations** (*fakatāpū*/'*faka'apa'apa*)

Tonga has six districts and 52 villages spread across three island chains, Vava'u, Ha'apai and Tongatapu. Despite its smaller size, Tonga punches above its weight in voyaging and colonisation, with a reputation for involving itself in its neighbours' affairs. It also has a long and complex history of power sharing within Tonga with the three ha'a tu'i titles that transitioned from Tu'i Tonga to Tu'i Ha'atakalaua and Tu'i Kanokupolu. While ceremonial salutations recognise local and village level roles as in Fiji and Samoa, we focus on the ancient classes and titles here as the most distinct feature of Tongan salutations. As noted, the current monarchy was founded by a group of Samoan refugees who seized power and sealed it with a dynastic marriage.

*Fakatāpū Ha'a Tu'i*  
(Welcome, royalty)

*Fakatāpū Hou'eiki Nōpele*  
(Welcome, nobility)

*Fakatāpū Ha'a Me'avale/Ha'a tu'a*  
(Welcome, commoner)

### **Contemporary relevance and efficacy**

The importance of salutations, titles and ceremonies recalling and reinforcing age-old connections continues to the present day. Some form an integral part of international diplomacy between Pacific Island states. For example, during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting celebrations in Apia in October 2024, visiting Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka had the ancient Samoan chiefly title of

Tagaloa-a-lagi bestowed upon him in an elaborate ceremony at the village of Le'auva'a, with which the title is associated. Prime Minister Tagaloa Rabuka thanked the people of Le'auva'a for their hospitality and referred to the village as his own during the ceremony. The Samoa News Hub website noted that 'By receiving this title, Rabuka is recognised for his commitment to building relationships and his role in Pacific regional cooperation' ('Fijian Prime Minister receives chiefly title in Samoa', 2024).

Such traditional protocols are not limited to relations within Western Polynesia. The previous year, Prime Minister Rabuka and his recently elected government had prioritised a state visit to Kiribati in January 2023 as their first overseas trip to 'restore trust, respect and understanding' in response to Kiribati's withdrawal from the Pacific Islands Forum after the unspoken protocol of revolving leadership was denied to Micronesia. During the visit, the entire Fijian delegation participated in the traditional Fijian ceremony of the *boka*, which involved their presentation of the *tabua* (whale's tooth) and *yagona* (kava) to President Taneti Maamau of Kiribati. They explained to their I-Kiribati hosts that the *boka*: 'is especially observed and practiced by close relatives to acknowledge deep and sincere regret for not being present in the ritual ceremony and period of mourning during a funeral rite of passage' and was being presented to express their 'deep sense of grief' and 'affirmation of one's commitment to kinship and solidarity' towards the people of Kiribati in the spirit of the Pacific Way. In response, President Maamau noted that:

Kiribati as a Pacific nation has truly felt that brotherly love that translates into the Pacific way of acceptance, reconciliation, peace and unity. These values and principles have not only been the shared building blocks of our histories and cultures but will also be the pillars of the future that we aspire towards as a Blue Pacific region. (Magick, 2023).

Such reconnections of people's hearts operate at many levels. Perhaps the most important is at the ordinary level, which happens almost daily

with minimal fuss and cost while providing immense benefit for social cohesion and harmony.

When I (Atoese Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano) came to the University of the South Pacific as a student in 1974, our national event celebrations almost always included a local dignitary, and Ratu David Toganivalu was a favourite guest, as were his brothers, all of whom had distinguished careers. Ratu David was Fiji's deputy prime minister and would often represent or accompany Prime Minister Ratu Mara to the South Pacific Forum's leaders meeting, which rotated among member countries. Ratu David told the story that when in Samoa he mentioned that he had a Samoan connection. His host immediately made inquiries, and at the village of Fasito'otai, the family acknowledged their lost relative in Fiji. Once connections were established, Ratu David was invited to the village and he updated them on the Fiji side of the family, and in return the family conferred on him an *ali'i* (titular chiefly) title<sup>13</sup> in honour of the reconnection (Tuimaleali'ifano, 1990). At his father's village on the island Bau, Toganivalu is one of two high-ranking heralds to the war lord and Vunivalu of Bau, head of the kingdom of Kubuna. Additionally, Ratu David's wife and half-sister of Ratu Mara, Adi Davila, is a descendant of the *matai* Lemaki of Fulanga and Kabara from Manono, Samoa. In his memoirs (Mara, 1997), Ratu Mara tells of the origin of his name. He was informed that his name Kamisese was derived from the (Tupua) Tamasese title, which at the time of his birth was held by the Mau leader, who was later slain, in 1929. Ratu Mara then developed a close personal relationship with Samoa's Prime Minister Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV, son of the ill-fated leader.

The neighbourly relations between Tonga, Samoa and Fiji have deep historical ties. Samoa and Tonga are honour-bound to be at peace after

---

13 Ratu David was conferred the Toleafoa title by the Afamasaga family, acknowledging Ratu David's Toleafoa Moloka connection. Presiding at the conferring ceremony was Afamasaga Ioane and Toleafoa Tua of Fasito'otai village, A'ana. See.

Tonga's departure from Samoa. This was reflected in the ejection aTu'i Tonga Tala'aifei'i's celebrated farewell tribute:

*malo tau malo toa, a o'u toe sau, oute sau ile vasa folau ae  
le ole vasa tau*

(Well fought brave warrior, when next I return, I shall  
come in peace and not war).

And Fiji's footprint in Savai'i is indelibly memorialised by the village of Fagamalo in the *ali'i* title of Tui Fiti. Fiji's Governor General Ratu Sir George Cakobau visited Fagamalo village in 1976 and was honoured with an *ali'i* title, Pesetamanaia. The late Ratu Jone Madraiwiwi and Roko Tui Bau was similarly honoured with the Sulu'ape *matai* title, which reconnected Fiji and Samoa in the guild of the *tatau* (tattoo craft).

Through these honorary connections, quiet and unhurried diplomacies are filtered and mediated via herald attendants and orators in the background on behalf of clans, districts, churches, nations and regions. While presidents, prime ministers, cabinet ministers and diplomats have been honoured with local insignia and ceremonies, only time will tell whether the attenuated devices will synchronise and synthesise with their bearers. However, the depth and breadth of the largely unheralded ceremonial connections outlined in this chapter suggests that the extent, enduring quality and influence of these interactions should not be underestimated.

## **Conclusion: Human devices for reshaping the future**

The 500 years of the European age from the 15th to the 20th century has seen:

diplomats and rulers, mariners and traders,  
missionaries and settlers penetrate almost every  
continent and inhabited island, and through

their activities reshape the moral and intellectual compass of non-Western peoples and cultures in greatly varying ways and degrees. Yet though the cultural patterns of Pacific societies were often transformed, they 'were never wholly destroyed.' (Davidson, 1967, p. ix)

This perhaps is where the heart of the matter lies, in the transformation and constant need for the articulation of the character and the scale of the process.

Salutations acknowledging and showing respect for custodians of knowledge and propriety in Western Polynesia have persisted for at least three reasons. The first is colonial expediency and cost-cutting measures whereby villages were largely left alone to govern by local norms. The second is that the rules governing local authorities were written and published by churches to help frame their activities. Last, and perhaps most importantly for the subject of this volume, they have a remarkable ability to adapt.

Despite over 200 years of exposure to the Western logos, for the vast majority of Pacific Islanders, order is mediated through oral traditions. The impact of the phenomenal literacy revolution is still evolving in families, villages and classrooms, as these human devices connect societies in transition, from pre-literate to literate, orality to reading and writing, from memory to reflecting the past onto the present. These oral cultural devices sustain a people's past, one that was not wholly destroyed but suppressed and sidelined. They may yet help rebuild, reconcile and reshape their hearts, minds and lands.

## References

- Baleilevuka, R. (2017, May 6). *Turaga na Tui Noco explains why they came up with the name 'Luvedra na Ratu' for Indo Fijians*. Fiji Village. <https://www.fijivillage.com/news-feature/Turaga-na-Tui-Noco-explains-why-they-came-up-with-the-name-Luvedra-na-Ratu-for-Indo-Fijians-5sk29r>
- Bambridge, T., D'Arcy, P., & Mawyer, A. (2021). Oceanian sovereignty: Rethinking conservation in a sea of islands. *Pacific Conservation Biology*, 27(3), 345–353. <https://doi.org/10.1071/PC20026>
- Capell, A. (1984). *A new Fijian dictionary*. Government Printer.
- Churchward, C. M. (1959). *Tongan dictionary*. Government Printing Press.
- Davidson, J. W. (1967). *Samoa mo Samoa: The emergence of the independent state of Samoa*. Oxford University Press.
- Davidson, J. W. (1970). Lauaki Namulau'ulu Mamoe: A traditionalist in Samoan politics. In J. W. Davidson & D. Scarr (Eds.), *Pacific islands portraits* (pp. 267–300). A. H. & A. W. Reed.
- Faalupega O Samoa. (n.d.). *Posts* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved November 20, 2022, from <https://www.facebook.com/Faalupega.O.Samoa>
- Fijian Prime Minister receives chiefly title in Samoa. (2024, October 24). *Samoa News Hub*. <https://samoanewshub.com/2024/10/24/fijian-prime-minister-receives-chiefly-title-in-samoa/>
- France, P. (1969). *The charter of the land*. Oxford University Press.
- Fry, G. (2019). *Framing the islands: Power and diplomatic agency in Pacific regionalism*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/FI.2019>

- Gunson, N. (1990). The Tonga–Samoa connection 1777–1845: Some observations on the nature of Tongan imperialism. *Journal of Pacific History*, 25(2), 176–187.
- Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our sea of islands. *The Contemporary Pacific: A Journal of Island Affairs*, 6, 148–161.
- Ilaiu, S. L. (2019). *Paradigm shifts in ancient kingship traditions in Tonga. A historical and anthropological examination of political practices and changes throughout the tripartite system of government: 1350–1875. The Case of Hau* [PhD thesis, Massey University]. <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/items/b75f7638-926e-49b5-abac-db63fbe8b859>
- Kramer, A. (1994). *The Samoa Islands, volume 1* (T. Verhaaren, Trans). University of Hawaii Press. (Original work published 1901)
- Magick, S. (2023, January 21). Fiji, Kiribati restore 'trust, respect and understanding'. *Islands Business*. <https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/kiribati-fiji-2/>
- Mara, K. T. (1997). *The Pacific Way: A memoir*. University of Honolulu Press.
- Milner, G. B. (1966). *Samoa dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
- Ministry for Education and Culture Samoa. (1999). The sacred forest of the Tui Fiti. In *Sāmoa ne'i Galo, Sāmoa lest we forget, 1998–1999* (2nd ed.). Government of Sāmoa.
- Rakuita, T., Sakai, S., Rakuita, E., & Tuimaleali'ifano, M. (2024). *Bridging the divides and healing the Vanua: The role of the tukutuku raraba in the history of Fijians and the importance of critical review in modern Fiji. The example from the succession to the Vunivalu title of the yavusa Sovatabua, Natewa*. University of the South Pacific. <https://repository.usp.ac.fj/id/eprint/14686/1/Bridging%20the%20divides%20and%20healing%20the%20Vanua.pdf>

Stair, J. B. (1897). *Old Samoa, or flotsam and jetsam from the Pacific Ocean*. The Religious Tract Society.

Tcherkézoff, S. (2002). Subjects and objects in Samoa: Ceremonial mats have a 'soul'. In B. Juillerat & M. Jeudy-Ballini (Eds.), *People and things: Social mediations in Oceania* (pp. 27–51). Carolina Academic Press.

Tcherkézoff, S. (2012). More on Polynesian gift-giving: The Samoan *sau* and the fine mats (*toonga*), the Maori *hau* and the treasures (*taonga*). *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2(2), 313–324. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau2.2.016>

Tuimaleali'ifano, A. M., & D'Arcy, P. (2023). Oral traditions in Pacific history. In R. Jones & M. Matsuda (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of the Pacific Ocean, volume 1* (pp. 276–295). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108539272.017>

Vunidilo, T. (2023). The Mataisau clan of Fiji: Roles and responsibilities. *Pacific Arts*, 23(2), 88–102. <https://doi.org/10.5070/pc223263051>

Wolf, Eric R. (2010). *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

# 5

## **Giving one's word and giving one's paper:**

Hybrid diplomatic agreements  
between indigenous Pacific states  
in the 19th century

LORENZ GONSCHOR

Over centuries, the peoples of Oceania developed various procedures and protocols to organise relations at various levels of political organisation, such as between families, villages, tribes or larger entities such as chiefdoms, tribal confederacies or kingdoms. Several chapters in this book deal with these systems in great detail. With European contact, however, Oceanian societies were confronted with a different kind of diplomatic relations, centred on the written word. Even before missionaries had reduced indigenous languages to writing, visiting Europeans expected to regulate their relations with Island communities by way of papers they asked Islanders to sign.

While a lot has been written about such – often highly unequal – written contracts and treaties between Westerners and Islanders, and their ramifications until today, little attention has been paid to the fact that Western ways of formalising intercommunal relations also influenced the development of relations between indigenous Oceanian polities. Similar to other developments in statecraft mixing traditional and European elements – the creation of law codes, constitutions, royal palaces and other government buildings come to mind – the 19th century saw the development of hybrid diplomatic practices that combined indigenous and Western forms. My use of the term ‘hybrid’ here is based on that of Kamanamaikalani Beamer, who, conceptually influenced by Homi Bhabha, has popularised the term ‘hybridity’ in his various publications on the Hawaiian Kingdom (Beamer, 2014; Bhaba, 1994).

In this chapter, I will examine this phenomenon by way of three case studies chronologically spread across almost the entire 19th century. The first is the 1810 agreement between King Kamehameha I of Hawai‘i and King Kaumuali‘i of the islands of Kaua‘i and Ni‘ihau, in which the latter ceded his authority to the former and accepted that his *aupuni* (kingdom) would be henceforth under Kamehameha’s suzerainty. The second case study is the treaties of friendship and mutual military support that King George Tupou I of Tonga concluded with the two Fijian *matanitū* (large chiefdoms) of Lakeba and Bua in 1865. The third case study is the treaty of political confederation between the *aupuni* of the Hawaiian Islands and the *mālō* (government) of Samoa of 1887, intended as a first step in the creation of a larger confederation of Polynesian states.

In the first two cases, the agreements were purely between indigenous polities without involving a European power, and the solemnity of the agreements for the participating Islanders was mainly based on the use of elaborate traditional protocol. Yet, in both instances, the contracting parties also insisted on creating written documents in English, and on having these documents deposited with Western institutions (a visiting ship in 1810, and the British consulate in Levuka in 1865, respectively)

to give the agreements a format recognisable by Europeans. The *mana* of those agreements thus articulated itself in both indigenous and Western forms. The third case study, situated in the context of intense Western imperial rivalry, was a more direct response to European actions; namely, to counteract Western colonisation attempts by forging an alliance of native states. However, to make it both readable to Europeans as a construct of international law and meaningful to the people of the alliance, a union of Oceanian sister peoples, it similarly uses both written documents (now also using written indigenous languages besides English) and elements of traditional or neo-traditional protocol.

Since, in all three cases, Western powers were not directly involved, Eurocentric historiography has not taken much notice of these cases. Certainly, the 1810 and 1865 agreements were not included in standard works of reference such as the Consolidated Treaty Series, given the fact that neither of the entities involved were at the time recognised as being members of the Western ‘family of nations’ (Parry, 1969–1980).<sup>1</sup> While English versions of the written treaties have luckily been preserved in unexpected locations, other primary sources that may provide more background information for the two case studies are fragmentary. With only Hawai‘i, but not Samoa, being so recognised in 1887, the treaty between them is similarly missing from most international reference works, although it was more widely disseminated through official publications by the Hawaiian Kingdom Government at the time, and the original manuscripts have been preserved at the Hawaiian Archives. Hence, as a caveat, the current chapter cannot claim to be either exhaustive in source material or definitive in analysis, especially regarding the 1810 and 1865 case studies.

---

1 It is noteworthy, in this context, that treaties Hawai‘i concluded with various Western powers after having received international recognition as an independent state in 1843 are included in this series.

## The treaty between the *aupuni* of Hawai'i and the *aupuni* of Kaua'i (1810)

The first documented written treaty between two indigenous polities in Oceania was signed in 1810 in the context of the unification of the Hawaiian Islands into one kingdom by Kamehameha I (c. 1758–1819, Figure 3).



FIGURE 3: *KAMEHAMEHA I*, PAINTING BY JAMES GAY SAWKINS (1850)<sup>A</sup>

In a series of battles between 1782 and 1795, Kamehameha had first consolidated his rule over Hawai'i Island, one of the four pre-contact *aupuni* (polities, usually translated as 'kingdoms') in the archipelago and then conquered the neighbouring *aupuni* of Maui and O'ahu (Kuykendall, 1938;

Sai, 2011). The fourth of the Hawaiian kingdoms, Kaua'i, which included the smaller island of Ni'ihau, proved more difficult to incorporate into Kamehameha's *aupuni* (Wichman, 2003). On two occasions, in 1796 and in 1803, Kamehameha had attempted to invade Kaua'i to defeat its king Kaumuali'i (c. 1778–1824, Figure 4) and add his islands to the Hawaiian Kingdom, but both attempts failed. Hence, from 1804 onward, Kamehameha attempted to convince Kaumuali'i to enter into negotiations with him to achieve a peaceful unification of the two realms. This eventually succeeded, culminating with Kaumuali'i agreeing to become a tributary of Kamehameha in 1810.

A Source: *Wikimedia Commons* ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kamehameha\\_I\\_portrait\\_by\\_James\\_Gay\\_Sawkins.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kamehameha_I_portrait_by_James_Gay_Sawkins.jpg)). In the public domain.



FIGURE 4: STATUE OF KAUMUALI'I IN PAKALA, KAUAI (2021)<sup>B</sup>

Thanks to a vivid description by Hawaiian historian Samuela Mānaiakalani Kamakau – who published a detailed biography of King Kamehameha in the late 1860s, based on oral histories he collected – we know quite a few details about the negotiations

between the two rulers that led to the agreement and the traditional protocols they observed (Kamakau, 1867/1996).<sup>2</sup>

The story goes as follows: residing on O'ahu, the island nearest to Kaua'i, Kamehameha first sent Kihei, a relatively low-ranking *ali'i* (nobleman), as his *'elele* (messenger) to Kaua'i to invite Kaumuali'i to come over to O'ahu and negotiate. As a sign of goodwill, Kihei was given lands and wives to settle down on Kaua'i, and Kaumuali'i sent his own *'elele* – a similarly lower-ranking *ali'i* by the name of Wahine – to some relatives of Kaumuali'i who were residing on O'ahu, and through them to Kamehameha. Wahine's message was that Kaumuali'i was ready for a *ku'ikahi* (agreement) of peace between the two rulers. Kamehameha sent Wahine back to Kaua'i with many valuable presents, including functional ones such as *peleleu* (war canoes) and prestige items such as *'ahu 'ula* (feather capes). Kaumuali'i received the gifts with gratitude but

2 Also republished in Kamakau (1992), pp. 194–196.

B Source: Adapted from photograph by Famartin, Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2021-10-07\\_10\\_12\\_22\\_Representation\\_of\\_Kaumuali%CA%BBi\\_at\\_Russian\\_Fort\\_Elizabeth\\_State\\_Historical\\_Park\\_in\\_Pakala\\_Village,\\_Kauai,\\_Hawaii.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2021-10-07_10_12_22_Representation_of_Kaumuali%CA%BBi_at_Russian_Fort_Elizabeth_State_Historical_Park_in_Pakala_Village,_Kauai,_Hawaii.jpg)). CC BY-SA 4.0.

was still reluctant to come over himself, so he sent Pākikō, a personal friend and high-ranking member of his court, with a lot of gifts in return. Unfortunately, Pākikō's party perished in a storm, so Kamehameha waited in vain, and sent several other *'elele* to inquire, all of whom were given lands and wives on Kaua'i, a long-term strategy of Kaumuali'i to build trust and create networks of mutual dependency. Eventually, Kamehameha sent a delegation of very high-ranking members of his court, including his *haole* (foreign) adviser Isaac Davis; and Kaumuali'i, still reluctant to make the visit himself, reciprocated by sending a delegation to O'ahu, including his nephew Kamaholelani and his wife Nāmāhana. Kamehameha received them with great enthusiasm and sent them home to Kaua'i with lots of gifts, while assigning a high-ranking *ali'i* woman to Kamaholelani as another wife.

It was this last stage in many years of representative diplomacy – seeing his nephew come home unharmed and showered with presents – that finally convinced Kaumuali'i to come to O'ahu. He did this aboard the American trading ship *Albatross*, captained by Jonathan Winship, who apparently had agreed to leave his first mate on Kaua'i as a hostage (Kuykendall, 1938, p. 50) and was accompanied by his trusted *kahuna* (priests) and *'alihikaua* (war chiefs). Kamehameha approached the ship off the coast of O'ahu with a fleet of canoes, also accompanied by his chief advisors including his *pūkaua nui* (chief of staff) Kalanimoku and Davis, and came aboard Winship's ship to greet the king of Kaua'i. Using a metaphorical style of solemn speeches referred to as *kaona*, Kaumuali'i greeted him with the words 'Eia au lā; i luna ke alo, i lalo ke alo?' (Here I am; is it face up, or is it face down?), upon which Kamehameha answered "A'ole' (No)<sup>3</sup>. This signified that Kaumuali'i would not be

---

3 The metaphorical phrase is to be understood to refer to her Kamehameha would kill Kaumuali'i (face down) or let him live (face up). Why Kamehameha did not answer with one of those choices but rather oddly with 'no' is not further commented on in Kamakau's narrative. Personally, I would interpret it in a Machiavellian way, given Kamehameha's well-known strategic thinking. Once Kaumuali'i had conceded to Kamehameha the power of life and death over him, Kamehameha would have renounced that power if he had clearly answered 'face up'. Instead, by answering it ambiguously, he could preserve this power.

harmed, and he responded in offering his *aupuni* to Kamehameha to rule over. Kamehameha, in turn, refused the offer, telling Kaumuali'i to return and continue to rule over his realm, but that it would eventually pass to his (Kamehameha's) heir Liholiho (the future Kamehameha II). During the ensuing feast and gift-giving ceremony on land, a group of Kamehameha's advisors suggested a plot to kill Kaumuali'i in order to unify the archipelago once and for all, but the plot was averted, and Kamehameha remained steadfast to his word.

The agreement indeed conserved peace through the Hawaiian Islands for as long as the two rulers lived, and thus it testifies to the often-underrated elements of diplomacy and mutual consent in the process of Hawai'i's unification, the historiography of which has been unduly focused on warfare only (D'Arcy, 2018).

For more than a century, the assumption was that the agreement – involving a Western ship as a means of transportation and a few Westerners as observers but otherwise taking place firmly within the realm of traditional Hawaiian inter-polity diplomacy and protocols – was limited to the two rulers giving each other their solemn word. However, it turned out that the agreement was also documented in a written statement in the English language by the Western observers witnessing it.

In a document dated 20 March 1810, Captain Winship recorded how the meeting between the two kings took place, and that Kamehameha:

promises on his part never to visit, or invade, the Islands of Atooi [Kaua'i] or Onehow [Ni'ihau] with any military armament or hostile intentions and also, promises to exert himself to maintain Tamoree [Kaumuali'i] on the Islands of [Kaua'i] and [Ni'ihau] if necessary.

Since this document predated the creation of a written Hawaiian language by missionaries (which happened only in the 1820s), the Hawaiian personal and place names were written in odd Anglicised ways but are nonetheless recognisable. Kamehameha signed the document with an X, and besides Winship, Thomas Robinson (presumably an officer on Winship's ship, or maybe a resident trader or beachcomber) and Francisco de Paula Marín (a Spanish beachcomber who served in Kamehameha's court) signed the document as witnesses (Stow, 1814).<sup>4</sup> While the original document is presumably lost, it was copied by British sandalwood trader Manasseh Stow into his journal, and the contents of the written treaty resurfaced when the journal was for sale at an antique book fair in the United States (US) in 2006 (see Appendix 1) (Shapiro, 2015).

We may speculate about the motivation for making the written treaty, and whose original idea it was to write it up. The fact that Kamehameha wrote his mark on it clearly demonstrates that that it was more than a note by Winship; it was something that clearly mattered to the indigenous protagonists of the agreement as well.

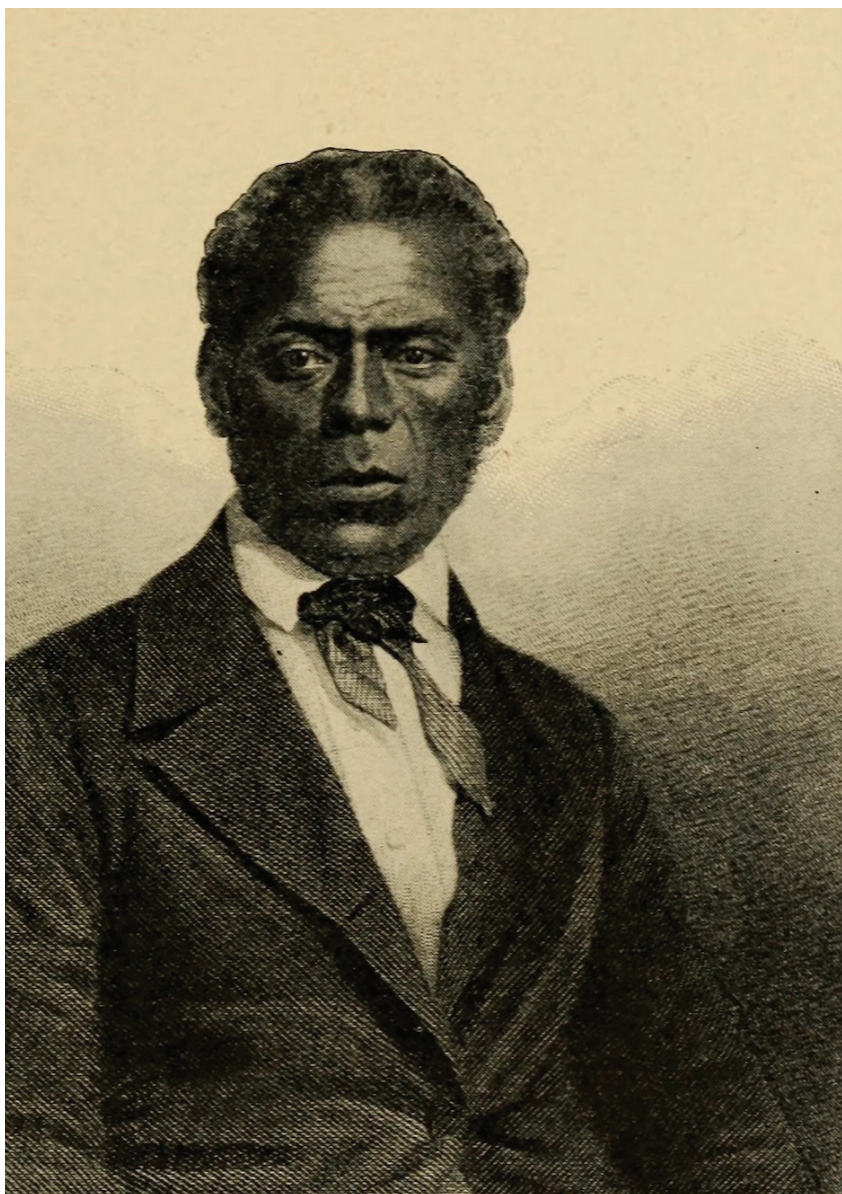
### **The treaties between the *pule'anga* of Tonga and the two *matanitū* of Bua and Lakeba in Fiji (1865)**

While the Hawaiian archipelago had been relatively isolated from the rest of Oceania during most of the pre-contact period and then fell under increasing Western influence very early on, the next two hybrid diplomatic agreements (our second case study) took place in a different situation. These treaties were made in an area of diverse yet related languages and cultures; a place where indigenous polities had interacted for centuries and Western influences took root much more slowly during the course of the 19th century.

---

4 On Marín, see Gast and Conrad, 2003.

FIGURE 5: GEORGE TUBOU [TUPOU], KING OF THE FRIENDLY ISLANDS, ENGRAVING BY JOHN COCHRAN (1860s)



Source: *Wikimedia Commons* ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George\\_Tupou\\_I\\_engraving\\_by\\_John\\_Cochran\\_\(1904\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_Tupou_I_engraving_by_John_Cochran_(1904).jpg)). *In the public domain.*

FIGURE 6: MA'AFU, TONGAN CHIEF IN FIJI, BY UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER (1870)



Source: *Wikipedia Commons* ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma%27afu,\\_Tongan\\_chief\\_in\\_Fiji,\\_1870.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma%27afu,_Tongan_chief_in_Fiji,_1870.jpg)). *In the public domain.*

Whereas in Tonga, the warlord Tāufaāhau, later known as King George Tupou I (c. 1797–1893, Figure 5) had reunified the archipelago as a Christian *pule’anga* (kingdom) during the first half of the 19th century, the neighbouring vast archipelago of Fiji was divided into multiple independent *vanua* (territories/chiefdoms), some of which had formed extended networks or confederations known as *matanitū* (paramount chiefdoms/confederations of chiefdoms). The most powerful of these were Bau and Rewa, on the eastern side of Viti Levu, and Cakaudrove, at the south-east of Vanua Levu. From the 1830s onwards, Tonga became part of the power struggles between these three *matanitū*. Not only had Tongan converts been involved in the beginning of Christian missions in Fiji, but during the 1840s and 1850s, King George Tupou I’s cousin Enele Ma’afu (c. 1825–1881, Figure 6) had conquered a large domain in Fiji in the name of the Tongan kingdom and subsequently administered the conquered territories (see Figure 7) (Spurway, 2015). King Tupou I himself intervened militarily in Fijian power struggles to support his local ally Cakobau (c. 1815–1883), the paramount chief of Bau, against its arch-rival Rewa (Routledge, 1985).

FIGURE 7: MAP OF TONGA AND FIJI, SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

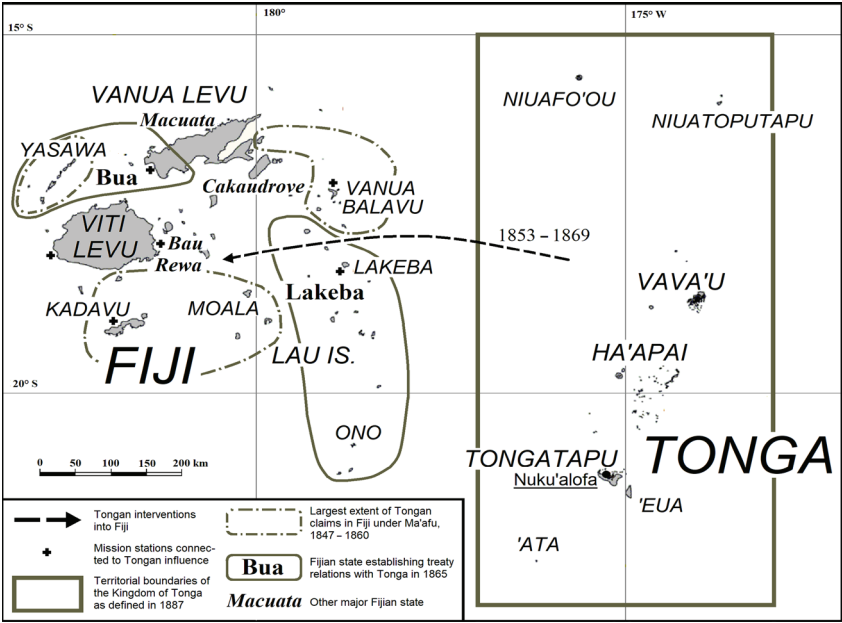


FIGURE 8: TUI BUA GEORGE RA MASIMA VAKAWALETABUA, PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANCIS H DUFTY (1870s)



Source: *Wikipedia Commons* ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma%27afu,\\_Tongan\\_chief\\_in\\_Fiji,\\_1870.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma%27afu,_Tongan_chief_in_Fiji,_1870.jpg)). *In the public domain.*

It was in this context that two of the smaller *matanitū*, Bua on the western side of Vanua Levu and Lakeba in the Lau Islands, concluded treaties of alliance with Tonga in 1865 (Spurway, 2015). Both were particularly closely allied with Tonga, as both of their leaders – the Tui Bua (paramount chief of Bua) George Ra Masima Vakawaletabua (d. 1889, Figure 8) and the Tui Nayau (paramount chief of Lakeba) Edward Taliai Tupou (d. 1875) – had genealogical ties to the Tongan royal family, had hosted Tongan missionaries on their territory and were early converts, and they were well aware that they lacked the manpower to maintain themselves against the larger *matanitū* such as Bau or Cakaudrove.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, they were aware that formalising their relationship with Tonga through a solemn agreement of alliance between formally equal polities would also protect them against becoming completely dominated by their ally Ma'afu and eventually being absorbed into his domains (Reid, 1977; Spurway, 2015)

Unfortunately, few sources have been found that describe the details of the negotiations leading to the conclusion of the two treaties, including which mechanisms of traditional Fijian or Tongan diplomacy were employed. While archival research has been conducted to find English translations of the two treaties, neither the Fijian and Tongan originals have been found, nor narratives similar to Kamakau's narrative of the traditional protocols referred to in the previous case study.

What is known, however, is that there existed elaborate systems of Indigenous diplomacy and protocol to create and maintain peaceful relations between the various Fijian *vanua* and *matanitū*, the most important perhaps being the institutions of the *matanivanua* (herald, head of protocol, master of intertribal relations) and the *mataki* (envoy,

---

5 Most works of Fijian history refer to the mentioned Tui Nayau titleholder only with the Tonganised version of his Fijian personal name Taliai Tupou, whereas on contemporary written primary documents he is often referred to by his baptismal name and title as Edward Tui Nayau. The same goes for the Tui Bua, who is often referred to as either Vakawaletabua, George Tui Bua or Ra Masima, but rarely by a combination of all four name components. For a short biography of George Ra Masima Vakawaletabua, see Parham, 1941, pp. 97–106.

ambassador to another *vanua*) (Nicole, this volume). Although this needs to be confirmed by further research, the various individuals who signed the written versions of the agreements were most likely people who previously fulfilled such traditional roles.

While the original written treaties appear to have been lost, their content was copied into the Register of Deeds of the British Consul to Fiji and Tonga by Henry Mitchell Jones (1831–1916), who served in the consular position from 1863 to 1868, and fortunately, the register is being preserved at the National Archives of Fiji (see Appendices 2 and 3; Registrar General's Department, British Consul for Fiji and Tonga, 1858–1873).

On the Tongan side, the treaties are signed on behalf of King George Tupou I by Ma'afu as well as by one 'Tubou Haabai' (Tupou Ha'apai in modern Tongan spelling), which was the adopted Tongan name of Englishman David Jebson Moss, whom King Tupou I had appointed his secretary in 1864 (Lātūkefu, 1974, pp. 192–193). Moss was in Fiji on a larger mission, primarily to confirm Ma'afu's territorial claims for Tonga and have them registered with the British consulate, given that Tonga at the time was pursuing diplomatic recognition first and foremost from the United Kingdom (UK) (Spurway, 2015).

The treaty with Bua carries the names of various co-signatories besides the Tui Bua, for most of whom the exact position in the Buan *matanitū* has not been determined, but the names of some have been carried on by succeeding generations until today.<sup>6</sup> They include the Tui Bua's brother Hezekiah Vunidaga and his secretary David Wilkinson (1831–1910) (Parham, 1941, pp. 99–100). They also include the *buli* (district chief) of Solevu, a tributary *vanua* that had only recently come under Bua's suzerainty, having previously been dependent on Bau (Spurway, 2015, p. 172). Hence the treaty also had the effect of indirectly confirming Bua's

---

6 Robert Nicole and Pio Manoa, personal communications, May 2022.

rule over Solevu. The second *buli* signing the treaty was of the smaller *vanua* of Navave located very closely to the core area of Bua (Hocart, 1952, p. 282).

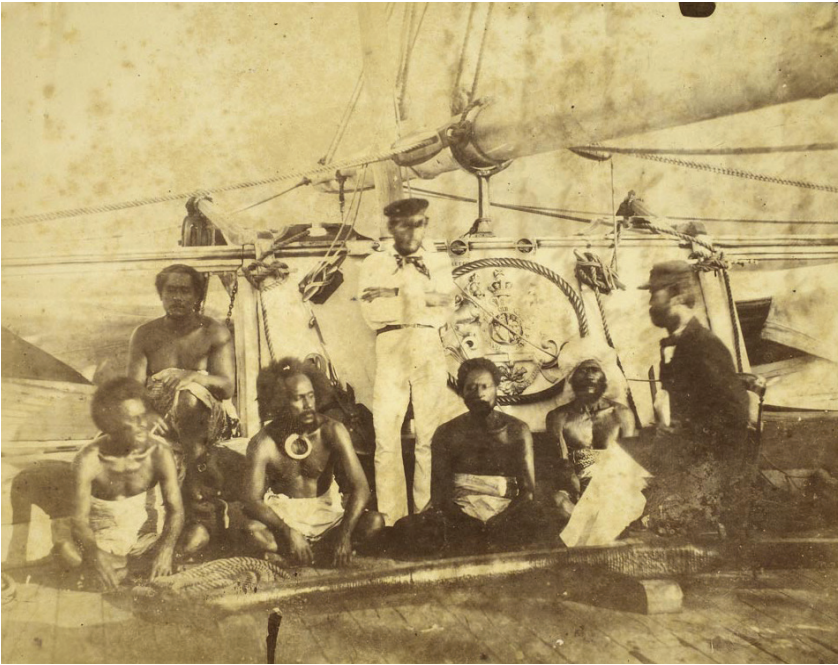
It is quite striking that the treaty with Lakeba carries fewer names. Besides the ruler of the *matanitū*, the Tui Nayau, these comprise only the Tui Tubou (a subordinate chief on Lakeba Island) and Sakiusa Sokotukivei, a young relative of the Tui Nayau, who would later visit Tonga to participate in the Tongan parliament's proceedings in 1867 (in other words, to temporarily serve as Lakeba's *mataki Toga*) (Spurway, 2015, p. 211).

While there are, unfortunately, no images of the negotiations leading to the two treaties, they may have taken place in a culturally and technologically hybrid form similar to the negotiations that took place a few years earlier. In 1862, aboard the British navy ship *Pelorus* negotiations between the rival chiefs Ritova and Bete claiming supremacy within the *matanitū* of Macuata in northern Viti Levu involved both a Tongan party led by Ma'afu and Jones's predecessor as British consul, William Thomas Pritchard (1829–1907, in office 1858 to 1863) (Pritchard, 1866, pp. 335–342).

On the preserved photograph taken of this occasion, one can see how the Fijian and Tongan chiefs are wearing traditional clothes and sitting down in a way corresponding to Fijian protocol, but the scene takes place aboard a Western ship, and the British consul is sitting next to them on a chair to take notes, presumably to produce a written agreement similar to those later written down by Jones (Figure 9).

In the Macuata negotiations, the involvement of a British warship added the factor of British imperial intervention into the equation, but in contrast, the Bua and Lakeba treaties were apparently concluded by representatives of the native states alone, and only later registered with the British consulate.

FIGURE 9: CONFERENCE, FIJIAN AND TONGUESE [TONGAN] CHIEFS ON HMS PELORUS AT MATHUATA [MACUATA], VANUA LEVU, FIJI.



*L–R: Unknown, Maʻafu (seated at back), Sialeʻataongo, consular interpreter Charles Wise, unknown, Ritova, Consul William Thomas Pritchard. Photographer unknown (1861). Source: Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS\\_Pelorus,\\_at\\_Vanua\\_Levu,\\_1861.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Pelorus,_at_Vanua_Levu,_1861.jpg)). In the public domain.*

Similar to the Hawaiʻi–Kauaʻi treaty half a century earlier, they are thus examples of hybrid Indigenous diplomacy, dealing with matters between native polities but later made legible for Westerners as well. In the end, however, the agreements' ramifications were short-lived. Maʻafu officially separated himself and his Fijian domains from the Tongan government in 1869 and henceforth acted as if he were a Fijian chief, then in 1871, all the Fijian *matanitū* merged into the larger Kingdom of Fiji under Cakobau, and Fiji as a whole was annexed as a British colony in 1874. The Kingdom of Tonga was no longer formally involved in any of this, and the treaties became moot.

## **The treaty of confederation between Hawai'i and Samoa (1887)**

The first two case studies mark the beginning of transition from oral, protocol-based diplomacy to written, document-based diplomacy. Situated between parties that had traditionally interacted for generations – either within the same cultural and language sphere (the Hawaiian Islands) or between two different but related linguistic and cultural spaces that had been in contact with each other since time immemorial (Fiji and Tonga) – the treaties merely added a new dimension to inter-polity interaction by documenting agreements in written forms.

The third case study, an 1887 treaty of confederation between the Hawaiian and Samoan kingdoms, is quite different, as there was no direct pre-Western precedent for these relations. Indications of direct interaction between the two archipelagos in ancient times are relatively vague, and certainly no such interaction took place within the last one or two generations prior to European contact.

By 1887, however, Hawai'i and Samoa had both firmly entered the global Western-dominated system of diplomacy by having established formal diplomatic relations with various European powers, even though the quality of these relations differed greatly between the two archipelagos. Hawai'i had, from the 1840s onwards, integrated with the European 'Family of Nations' as a coequal, the first non-Western state to do so, and concluded equal treaties with almost every Western power, and diplomatic relations with a dozen or so more (Sai, 2011). By 1887, the Hawaiian Kingdom maintained 103 legations and consulates worldwide (Hawaiian Government, 1887b). In contrast, Samoa had only three international treaties (with Germany, the UK and the US), which were unequal, and it had no permanent diplomatic or consular representation overseas.

Importantly, leaders of both countries were well aware of each other and of these differences in the degree of international recognition, as were most other Polynesian monarchs of the period, since 'by mid-century,

Indigenous leaders in the Eastern Pacific were demonstrably and meaningfully interconnected' (Banivanua Mar, 2016, p. 66). Both had an interest in strengthening and formalising their relations: Samoa, by using formal relations with a fully recognised Oceanian sister nation as a means to foreclose colonial takeover by a Western power; and Hawai'i, by establishing itself as a regional power in order to strengthen its global international position.

From its first efforts in 1873 to form a modern form of government recognisable in Western terms, Samoa's leaders had interacted with the Hawaiian government and achieved its diplomatic recognition (Kalākaua, 1875). After more than a decade of political instability and increasing encroachment on its sovereignty – by both officials and private parties from Germany, the UK and the US – Hawai'i's King Kalākaua (1836–1891, r. 1874–1891, Figure 10) sent a formal diplomatic mission to Samoa in early 1887. This mission consisted of John Edward Bush (1842–1906) and Henry Poor (1856–1899) as well as the Hawaiian navy ship HHMS *Kaimiloa*, and aimed to negotiate a bilateral treaty and invite Samoa to join a political confederation under Hawai'i's leadership (Cook, 2018, pp. 151–152; Gonschor, 2019, pp. 97–100).

The *tama a 'āiga* (one of four paramount titleholders) Malietoa Laupepa (1841–1898), who at the time served as constitutional king (*tupu*) of Samoa, almost immediately agreed on signing the treaty, as did two of his executive advisors, minister of the interior MK Le Mamea (c. 1830–1910) and assistant secretary of state William Coe (1857–1909), and a group of eight *ta'imua* (high chiefs) and eight *faipule* (delegates), representing each of Samoa's main districts. Bush signed a declaration accepting the treaty and sent both documents home to Honolulu, where King Kalākaua formally ratified the treaty, and subsequently had it published in English and Hawaiian (see Appendix 4).<sup>7</sup>

---

7 Original signed Samoan-language treaty and English-language proclamation by Bush in Hawaiian Government (1887a), *1887 Samoan Affairs*, Hawai'i State Archives. Published version in

FIGURE 10: *KING DAVID KALĀKAUA*, UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER (1870s TO 1880s)



Source: *Hawai'i State Archives* ([https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark\\_70111\\_1DxM.0.jpeg](https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark_70111_1DxM.0.jpeg)). In the public domain.

Interestingly, on both sides there were indigenous individuals who had previously been involved in international diplomacy with Western

---

English in Hawaiian Government (1887d), *Treaties and conventions concluded between the Hawaiian Kingdom and other powers since 1825*, pp. 171–173; in Hawaiian in *Ka Nupepa Elele* (Hawaiian Government, 1887c, p. 3). The text reproduced as Appendix 4 is based on the published English version, augmented with a transcript of the Bush proclamation missing from this version, and crosschecked against the manuscript originals to correct typing errors of Samoan names.

powers. Henry Poor had participated in a circumnavigation in 1883 to 1884, visiting most European states as well as Japan (Hawaiian Government, 1884; Poor, n.d.), and Le Mamea had served as Samoa's only formal diplomat when he was sent to Washington DC in 1879 to negotiate Samoa's treaty with the US (Gilson, 1970, pp. 349–357). It is thus not surprising that the 1887 Hawaiian–Samoa treaty followed the forms and protocol of Western diplomacy first and foremost.

Yet traditional elements played very important elements as well. While many of the formal meetings between the Hawaiian diplomatic delegation and Laupepa's Samoan government in Apia followed Western protocol, for instance, their meeting aboard the HHMS *Kaimiloa* (Figure 11); there was also a deliberate use of hybridised traditional styles to underscore the situating of the relationship in an indigenous Oceanian logic.

Following meetings in traditional Samoan format of *fono* (council meeting) hosted by Laupepa, the Hawaiian legation reciprocated by inventing a 'royal Hawaiian Kava' ceremony, mixing elements of the observed indigenous protocol of Samoa with elements of traditional Hawaiian rituals and the consumption of alcohol, since by the late 19th century, the Hawaiian upper class had largely abandoned kava and replaced it with liquor (Stevenson, pp. 7–8).

Traditional protocol became most important, however, when the Hawaiian legation and their naval ship ventured outside Apia to negotiate with rival Samoan chiefs and convince them to give their blessing to the confederation, as is well documented with Mata'afa Iosefo, another *tama a 'aiga*, in the village of Lufilufi in eastern Upolu, where a meeting according to Samoan protocol took place (Figure 12, see p. 119).

Gift-giving was also a very important part of the negotiations, but rather than traditional Hawaiian items such as featherwork, as Kamehameha and Kaumuali'i had exchanged seven decades earlier, the Hawaiian legation to Samoa rather used modern goods appropriate for a royal

household of the Victorian era. These were goods that Hawai'i could afford but Samoa could not, such as horses and a carriage, as well as a luxury court uniform for Malietoa Laupepa (which he would wear at formal occasions for the rest of his life) (Hawaiian Government, 1887a).

FIGURE 11: *KING MALIETOA ON BOARD THE KAIMILOA AT SAMOA.*



*L–R: Hawaiian officials Moses Mahelona, Jerome Feary and Sam Maikai; Samoan King Malietoa Laupepa; Hawaiian envoy John E. Bush; Hawaiian secretary Henry F. Poor. Photograph by Joseph Strong (1887). Source: Hawai'i State Archives. ([https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark\\_70111\\_4b9R.0.jpeg](https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark_70111_4b9R.0.jpeg)). In the public domain.*

In the end, the treaty remained without much practical effect. For in mid-1887, Samoa was invaded by the German navy, and a German puppet regime installed to replace Laupepa's government, while almost simultaneously in Honolulu, a coup d'état was conducted by American missionary descendants against the Hawaiian government, bringing

FIGURE 12: *HAWAIIAN EMBASSY TO SAMOA. MEETING IN LUFILUFI, ATUA DISTRICT, UPOLU, SAMOA.*



*Front row, L–R: Hawaiian officials Hoa C Ulukou, Sam Maikai and Joseph S Webb; Tui Atua Mataāfa Iosefo; Hawaiian envoy John E Bush; Hawaiian secretary Henry F Poor; Hawaiian official Jerome Feary; Samoan assistant secretary of state William P Coe; and three unidentified Samoans. Band of Hawaiian navy ship Kaimiloa in the background. Photograph by Joseph Strong (1887). Source: Hawaiʻi State Archives ([https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark\\_70111\\_4b9S.0.jpeg](https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark_70111_4b9S.0.jpeg)). In the public domain.*

Hawaiʻi's proactive pan-Oceanian policy to an end (Gonschor, 2019, pp. 100–101; Meleiseā, 1987, p. 39).

## Conclusion

These three cases of hybridised diplomatic practice between Indigenous Oceanian polities represent fascinating episodes in Pacific history. They provide anecdotal glimpses into how these practices changed over time yet never broke definitively with previous traditions. In 1810, Kamehameha I and Kaumualiʻi made an agreement almost entirely within the logic and protocol of traditional inter-polity relations in the Hawaiian archipelago, and the written documentation of the agreement was merely an afterthought – possibly initiated by observing Europeans. Five decades later, literacy and the use of written documents had become widespread in Oceania, and the 1865 treaties between Tonga and the Fijian chiefdoms of Bua and Lakeba were thoroughly recorded in multilingual written documents, and yet traditional protocol likely played an important role in the agreements as well, as it certainly did

in relations between Fijian and Tongan polities during the period in general. Another two decades later, Oceanian states had been involved in formal, Western-style international diplomacy on the world stage, and when attempting to create a pan-Oceanian confederation, they used the formal processes of treaty negotiation and ratification to make their treaty globally recognisable; yet in much of the negotiations leading to the treaty, they still used traditional protocol, and even reinvented some new forms of it.

In conclusion, the three case studies are evidence that, based on a hybridisation of indigenous and Western forms, a specific Oceanian form of diplomacy was being formed during the 19th century. While the advent of colonialism interrupted this process for most of the 20th century, this book clearly shows that there has recently been a resurgence of 'hybridised' diplomacy in Oceania, taking various shapes between communities within Oceania's current nation-states, between such communities and nation-states, between Oceanian states, and also in diplomatic interactions with the wider world such as, for instance, the concept of *talanoa* in climate change conferences that has been promoted by Fijian and other Oceanian diplomats (e.g. see United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2018).

In the *longue durée*, we can thus observe a circular development of Oceanian diplomacy. While in the 19th century there was a gradual movement from traditional to Western styles, with hybrid forms as a functional compromise, colonialism then imposed a purely Western form of diplomacy. Now there is an opposite development, moving away from Western forms and gradually reincorporating traditional elements. In that sense, the early examples of hybridised diplomatic practices discussed in this chapter can serve as relevant historical precedent in present debates on how to decolonise and indigenise diplomacy in Oceania today.

## **Acknowledgements**

I thank Robert Nicole and the late Pio Manoa for their help in transcribing and trying to identify the names on the Fijian–Tongan treaties.

## Appendix 1<sup>8</sup>: Transcript of a page from the journal of Manasseh Stow

*Copy of an agreement between King Tamaama [Kamehameha] and King Tamoree [Kaumuali'i]*

These are to Certify that by the earnest request of Tamaama King of the Island of Owyhee [Hawai'i], Mawee [Maui], Morotai [Molokai] &c &c and his Chiefs, and the particular desire of Tamoree King of Atooi [Kaua'i] and Onehow [Ni'ihau], and his Chiefs – I have brought the said Tamoree with his Chiefs relations and friends to the island of Waahoo [O'ahu], the present Residence of Tamaama for the purpose of settling a long dispute between them and to put an end to all the War and commotion among these Islands.

That we were politely rec<sup>d</sup> and sumptuously entertained during our residence on the Island and all differences amicably adjusted by a mutual Conference between the two Kings.

The said Tamaama promises on his part never to visit, or invade, the Islands of Atooi or Onehow with any military armament or hostile intentions and also, promises to exert himself to maintain Tamoree on the Islands of Atooi and Onehow if necessary.

In witness whereof we have hereunto put our hands and seals this 20<sup>th</sup> day of March in the Year of our Lord 1810.

Thomas Robinson

Signed - Jonan Winship

Francis de Paula Marin

Signed Tamaama his x mark  
King of Owyhee, &c

Signed, sealed and delivered in presence of us

Thomas Robinson

Francis de Paula Marin

---

8 The following transcripts are taken from handwritten texts, with all content presented verbatim.

## Appendix 2: Transcript of Register No. 371 from the Register of Deeds

### British Consul for Fiji and Tonga, Register of Deeds, 1858–1873, Vol. 1

[p. 620] This treaty made and entered into this third day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty five (1865) Between Jioaji Tubou King of the Tongan Islands, as represented by Tubou Haabaï and Henele Maafu on the first part, and Jioaji Tui Bua of the second part provided

1<sup>st</sup> That there shall be perpetual peace between the Government of H.M. the King of Toga and the Chief of Bua.

2<sup>nd</sup> The subjects of H. M. Jioaji Tubou shall have the right to come and go at all times to any part of the dominion of Tui Bua and to dwell therein, Tui Bua granting them land on which to dwell and cultivate, the said Tongans becoming the subjects of Tui Bua and subject to his laws and further that the subjects of Tui Bua shall receive the like privileges in all the Tongan dominions.

3<sup>rd</sup> And further, it is hereby agreed that in case of any Tongan becoming a subject of Tui Bua the said party shall be eligible for appointment to any Government situation that may be vacant and it is further granted that any Buaan who may dwell in the dominions of Tonga and become a Tongan subject then the said Buaan shall be eligible for any situation that may be vacant under the Tongan Government.

(Signed) Maafu

Witness to  
Signatures

Luki [Luke] buireguregu X

George Tui Bua X

Sami gaga X

Hezikah [Esikia] va  
ni daga  
[Vunidaga] X

Thomas Baker (Sig <sup>d</sup> )	Joni Lue [Lui] X	Mile [Meli] deba levu X
-------------------------------------	------------------	----------------------------

David Wilkinson (Sig <sup>d</sup> )	William Mudu na yabia X	Somi mi Taba X
---	-------------------------	----------------

Tubou Haabai (Sig <sup>d</sup> )	Tagi be tawa [Tagivetaua] X
----------------------------------	--------------------------------

Buli Navavi [Navave] X	Buli So Levu [Solevu] X
---------------------------	-------------------------

A true copy      January 17<sup>th</sup> 1865

[**Continues, p. 621**] I certify that I have translated this document into Tonguese and that the translation is correct.

(Signed) Tubou Haabai

I further certify that the foregoing document has been translated correctly into Fijian and a copy given to Tui Bua, and that he and his Chiefs understood the meaning of it.

(Signed) Thomas Baker

A true copy      January 17<sup>th</sup> 1865

Henry M. Jones  
Consul

### **Appendix 3. Transcript of Register No. 383 from the Register of Deeds**

#### **British Consul for Fiji and Tonga, Register of Deeds, 1858–1873, Vol. 1**

[p. 653] This Treaty made and entered into on the fourteenth (14) day of February in the year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and sixty five (1865) between George Tubou King of the Friendly Isles, and represented by Henry Maafu and Tubou Haabai of the one part, and Tui Neiau King of Lakeba and surrounding Islands, of the other part provided that

1# There shall be perpetual peace between the King of Tonga and the King of Lakeba.

2# It shall be lawful at all times for the Subjects of King George Tubou to visit Lakeba and the Islands connected therewith and in case of their wishing to reside in the said dominions, Tui Neiau shall grant them land on which to reside and plant, and during the time that any Tongan Subject resided in the dominions of Tui Neiau they shall be subject to his Laws the same as the people of the Country, and in case any of the subjects of Tui Neiau wish to go and reside in any of the dominions of H. M. George Tubou, they shall receive the same privileged as are given to Tongans in the dominions of Tui Neiau.

3# And should any Fijian Power make war upon the dominions of Tui Neiau, The Governor of the Tongans together with his warriors, shall at once go to the assistance of Tui Neiau, and should any Fijian Power make war upon the dominions of Tonga, which are situate in Fiji then shall Tui Neiau together with his warriors at once go to the assistance of the Governor of the Tongans – and Tui Neiau shall not enter into any war with any of the Powers of Fiji without having first consulted and come to an agreement with the Governor of the Tongans, and the Governor of the Tongans shall in like manner

[p. 654] be obligated to consult, and act in unison with the Tui Neiau ~~and his successor~~ on such occasion. –

4# And this document shall be binding on Tui Neiau and his successors in the Sovereignty and it shall also be binding on H. M. George Tubou and his successors.

Etiuate [Etuatē] Tui Neiau [Nayau] X

Kalisitane [Karisitiane] Tui Tubou X

Sakiusa Sokotukivei (Signed)

Maafu (Signed)

Witness to Signature      Tubou Haabai (Signed)

Thomas Blakelock (Signed)

Taimoukoli (Signed)

I hereby certify that I have translated the foregoing Treaty into the Fijian language and that the Chiefs of the place have had it read to them and know its meaning.

Lakeba

(Signed) Francis Tait

A true copy.

March 18<sup>th</sup> 1865

Henry M. Jones.  
Consul

## **Appendix 4. Transcript of treaty between Hawai'i and Samoa**

### **PROCLAMATION**

#### **TREATY BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF SAMOA AND THE KINGDOM OF THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS.**

[Seal]

By virtue of My inherent and recognized rights as King of the Samoan Islands by My own people and by Treaty with the three Great Powers of America, England and Germany, and by and with the advice of My Government and the consent of Taimua and Faipule, representing the Legislative powers of My Kingdom, I do hereby freely and voluntarily offer and agree and bind Myself to enter into a Political Confederation with His Majesty Kalakaua, King of the Hawaiian Islands, and I hereby give this solemn pledge that I will conform to whatever measures may hereafter be adopted by His Majesty Kalakaua and be mutually agreed upon to promote and carry into effect this Political Confederation, and to maintain it now and forever.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set My hand and seal this 17th day of February, A. D. 1887.

(M. E.) MALIETOA,  
King of Samoa.

By the King:

(Signed) Wm. Coe.

We, Taimua and Faipule of the Government of Samoa, appointed by the House of Taimua and Faipule, hereby approve of and support the above agreement.

(Signed)

TaimuaFaipule

Itu o Tane	Utumapu	Tafiloa X his mark	Atua
Faasaleleaga	[Pasi]	Vaafa'i X his mark	Laumua
Lufi Lufi	[Tuisami]	Uuga X his mark	Itu tane
Leulumoega	Tuao	Alipia X his mark	Leulumoega
Manono	Leiataua X his mark	[Seal]	Faasalelega
Tuamasaga	[Teo]		Itu teine
Faleao Palauli	Sū X his mark	Sao X his mark	“ “
Atua	Molioo	Vailuu X his mark	Aana

(Signed)

WILLIAM COE,  
Assistant Secretary of State

LE MAMEA.  
Minister of Interior

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full and true translation of the original document in the Samoan language.

William Coe,  
H. S. M.'s Interpreter.

-----

By virtue of the powers and authority vested in me as His Hawaiian Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary I do hereby acknowledge and accept in the name of my August Sovereign King Kalakaua the free offer and voluntary agreement of His Majesty King Malietoa Laupepa made this day to enter into a political confederation with His Majesty Kalakaua, and I on the part of my Sovereign give this solemn pledge that He will accept the said political confederation and will uphold and maintain the rights and independence of such confederation now and forever,

In witness whereof I set my hand and seal hereto at Apia this 17<sup>th</sup> day of February A.D. 1887

John E. Bush  
His Hawaiian Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary  
and Minister Plenipotentiary at Samoa

Witness  
Henry F. Poor

-----

KALAKAUA, by the Grace of God of the Hawaiian Islands, King: To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting: Whereas on the seventeenth day of February last past His Majesty Malietoa, King of the Samoan Islands, entered into an Agreement and Treaty binding himself to enter into a Political Confederation with Us, and whereas the said Agreement and Treaty was at the same time approved by the Taimua and Faipule of Samoa and accepted in Our name by Our Minister Plenipotentiary, Honorable John E. Bush, now, therefore, having read and considered the said Agreement and Treaty, We do by these Presents approve, accept, confirm and ratify it for Ourselves, Our Heirs and Successors, subject to the obligations which His Majesty Malietoa may be under to

those Foreign Powers with which He and the People of Samoa and the Government thereof have at this time any treaty relations, engaging and promising upon Our Royal Word to enter into Political Confederation with His Majesty King Malietoa, and to conform to such measures as may be hereafter agreed upon between Us for the carrying into effect of such Confederation. For the greater testimony and validity of all which We have caused the Great Seal of Our Kingdom to be affixed to these Presents, which We have signed with Our Royal hand.

[Seal]

Given at Our Palace of Iolani this Twentieth Day of March, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty-seven, and in the Fourteenth Year of Our Reign.

(M. R.) KALAKAUA.

By the King:

(Signed) WALTER M. GIBSON,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Premier.

Now be it known that the above Treaty having been duly accepted and ratified by His Majesty the King:

Therefore the said Treaty has become a part of the laws of this Kingdom and is to be observed accordingly.

WALTER M. GIBSON,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs.  
Foreign Office, Honolulu, March 21, 1887.

## References

- Banivanua Mar, T. (2016). *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous globalisation and the end of empire*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139794688>
- Beamer, K. (2014). *No Mākou ka mana: Liberating the nation*. Kamehameha Schools Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>
- Cochran, J. (ca. 1860). *George Tubou, King of the Friendly Islands* [Engraving]. Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George\\_Tupou\\_I\\_engraving\\_by\\_John\\_Cochran\\_\(1904\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_Tupou_I_engraving_by_John_Cochran_(1904).jpg)
- Conference, Fijian and Tonguese chiefs on HMS Pelorus at Mathuata, Vanua Levu, Fiji* [Photograph]. (1861). Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS\\_Pelorus,\\_at\\_Vanua\\_Levu,\\_1861.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Pelorus,_at_Vanua_Levu,_1861.jpg)
- Cook, K. (2018). *Return to Kahiki: Native Hawaiians in Oceania*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108164436>
- D'Arcy, P. (2018). *Transforming Hawai'i: Balancing coercion and consent in eighteenth-century Kānaka Maoli statecraft*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/TH.06.2018>
- Duffy, F. H. (ca. 1870). [Tui Bua George Ra Masima Vakawaletabua] [Photograph]. Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tui\\_Bua,\\_a\\_big\\_chief,\\_photograph\\_by\\_Francis\\_H.\\_Duffy.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tui_Bua,_a_big_chief,_photograph_by_Francis_H._Duffy.jpg)
- Famartin. (2021). [Statue of Kaumuali'i in Pakala, Kaua'i] [Photograph]. Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2021-10-07\\_10\\_12\\_22\\_Representation\\_of\\_Kaumuali%CA%BBi\\_at\\_Russian\\_Fort\\_Elizabeth\\_State\\_Historical\\_Park\\_in\\_Pakala\\_Village,\\_Kauai,\\_Hawaii.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2021-10-07_10_12_22_Representation_of_Kaumuali%CA%BBi_at_Russian_Fort_Elizabeth_State_Historical_Park_in_Pakala_Village,_Kauai,_Hawaii.jpg)

- Gast, R. H. & Conrad, A.C. (Eds.). (2003). *Don Francisco de Paula Marin: A biography. The letters and journal of Francisco de Paula Marin*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Gilson, R. P. (1970). *Samoa 1830–1900: The politics of a multi-cultural community*. Oxford University Press.
- Gonschor, L. (2019). *A power in the world: The Hawaiian kingdom in Oceania*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hawaiian Government. (1884). *1883–1884 envoy to Europe and Japan (C.P. Iaukea)*. Foreign Office and Executive (Boxes 404–460), Hawai'i State Archives, Honolulu.
- Hawaiian Government. (1887a). *1887 Samoan affairs*. Foreign Office and Executive (Box 34), Hawai'i State Archives, Honolulu.
- Hawaiian Government. (1887b, June 1). *Diplomatic and consular representatives of Hawaii abroad* [Printed broadsheet]. Foreign Office and Executive (Miscellaneous Foreign 1890), Hawai'i State Archives, Honolulu.
- Hawaiian Government. (1887c, April 2). Keena o na aina e, kuahaua: Kuikahi mawaena o ke aupuni o Samoa a me ke aupuni o ko Hawaii pae aina [Foreign affairs office, proclamation: Treaty between the Kingdom of Samoa and the Kingdom of the Hawaiian Islands]. *Ka Nupepa Elele*, 3.
- Hawaiian Government. (1887d). *Treaties and conventions concluded between the Hawaiian Kingdom and other powers since 1825*. Elele book, card and job print.
- Hocart, A. M. (1952). *The northern states of Fiji*. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.
- Kalākaua. (1875, July 16). [Letter to the Ta'imua of Samoa]. Foreign Office and Executive (Miscellaneous Foreign), Hawai'i State Archives, Honolulu.

Kamakau, S. M. (1992), *Ruling chiefs of Hawai'i* (D. Barrère, Ed. & Trans.). Kamehameha Schools Press.

Kamakau, S. M. (1996). Ka mo'olelo o Kamehameha I [The history of Kamehameha]: Helu 36. *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, 6(32), in P. Nogelmeier (Ed.), *Ke kumu aupuni: Ka mo'olelo Hawai'i no Kamehameha ka na'i aupuni a me kāna aupuni i ho'okumu ai* (pp. 174–177). Ahahui 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. (Reprinted from, 1867, "Ka mo'olelo o Kamehameha I: Helu 36", *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, 6[32])

King David Kalākaua [Photograph]. (ca. 1880). Hawai'i State Archives. [https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark\\_70111\\_1DxM.0.jpeg](https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark_70111_1DxM.0.jpeg)

Kuykendall, R. (1938). *The Hawaiian kingdom, Vol. 1: 1778–1854: Foundation and transformation*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Lātūkefu, S. (1974). *Church and state in Tonga: The Wesleyan Methodist missionaries and political development, 1822-1875*. ANU Press.

Ma'afu, Tongan chief in Fiji [Photograph]. (1870). Wikipedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma%27afu,\\_Tongan\\_chief\\_in\\_Fiji,\\_1870.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma%27afu,_Tongan_chief_in_Fiji,_1870.jpg)

Meleiseā, M. (1987). *The making of modern Samoa: Traditional authority and colonial authority in the modern history of Western Samoa*. Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Parham, H. B. H. (1941). A brief account of a well-known chief: Ra Masima, Tui Bua. *Transactions and proceedings of the Fiji Society of Science and Industry*, 2(2), 97–106.

Parry, C. (Ed.). (1969–1980). *The consolidated treaty series, 1648–1918*, 231 vols. Oxford University Press.

- Poor, H. F. (n.d.). *Henry F. Poor Collection*, Hawai'i State Archives, Honolulu.
- Pritchard, W. T. (1866). *Polynesian reminiscences, or life in the South Pacific Islands*. Chapman and Hall.
- Registrar General's Department, British Consul for Fiji and Tonga. (1858–1873). *Register of Deeds, Vol. 1*, Register No. 371, pp. 620–621, and Register No. 383, p. 653. National Archives of Fiji, Suva.
- Reid, A. C. (1977). The fruit of the *rewa*: Oral traditions and the growth of the pre-Christian Lakeba state. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 12(7), 2–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223347708572310>
- Routledge, D. (1985). *Matanitū: The struggle for power in early Fiji*. University of the South Pacific
- Sai, D. K. (2011). *Ua mau ke ea, sovereignty endures: An overview of the political and legal history of the Hawaiian Islands*. Pūā Foundation.
- Sawkins, J. G. (1850). *Kamehameha I* [Painting]. Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kamehameha\\_I,\\_portrait\\_by\\_James\\_Gay\\_Sawkins.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kamehameha_I,_portrait_by_James_Gay_Sawkins.jpg)
- Shapiro, M. (2015). The paper chase: Searching for Hawaiiana at the world's largest rare and antiquarian book fair. *Hana Hou: The Magazine of Hawaiian Airlines*, 18(4), 114–127.
- Spurway, J. (2015). *Ma'āfu, prince of Tonga, chief of Fiji: The life and times of Fiji's first Tui Lau*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/MPTCF.02.2015>
- Stevenson, R. L. (n.d.). *A Samoan scrapbook*. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Ms. No. 6,824–6,825), Yale University, New Haven.
- Stow, M. (1814). [Loose page inserted into manuscript journal, specific entry not dated]. Private collection of Jim Mussels, California.

- Strong, J. (1887). *Hawaiian embassy to Samoa* [Photograph]. Hawai'i State Archives. [https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark\\_70111\\_4b9S.0.jpeg](https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark_70111_4b9S.0.jpeg)
- Strong, J. (1887). *King Malietoa on board the Kaimiloa at Samoa* [Photograph]. Hawai'i State Archives. [https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark\\_70111\\_4b9S.0.jpeg](https://digitalarchives.hawaii.gov/resources/images/ark_70111_4b9S.0.jpeg)
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2018). *Talanoa Dialogue Platform*. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement/2018-talanoa-dialogue-platform>
- Wichman, F. B. (2003). *Nā pua ali'i o Kaua'i: Ruling chiefs of Kaua'i*. University of Hawai'i Press.

## 6

# Aboriginal Australian diplomacy as Oceanic diplomacy

MORGAN BRIGG & MARY GRAHAM

The original peoples of the Australian continent have for millennia fashioned ways of organising being together and relating with each other. These forms of political ordering and diplomacy deserve to be considered alongside other forms of human being-together, which taken together, militate against univocal conceptualisations of diplomacy based in easy yet erroneous distinctions between ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ peoples (Numelin, 1950; cf. Mair, 2006). However, contemporary and commonplace understandings of diplomacy overwhelmingly evoke this distinction by focusing upon diplomacy as the relatively recent practices among European-derived sovereign states. The emergence and consolidation of this form of political and inter-polity ordering is a story of domination that comes to us through imperialism, colonialism, development and globalisation. The accompanying history sets for us the task, both ethical and scholarly, of reopening and re-expanding our conceptualisations of diplomacy. The diversity of the world’s peoples obliges us to engage with fellow human beings to strive for more engaged

and representative knowledge. This task of telling more complete human stories of diplomacy requires us to unlearn dominant ways of thinking about diplomacy and to recuperate and engage with the inter-polity ordering of diverse peoples of the world.

In this chapter, we follow convention by referring to the original peoples of the Australian continent as Aboriginal or Indigenous people, or sometimes First Nations. We do so to make our work broadly intelligible, but from the outset, considering 'Aboriginal Australian Diplomacy' requires explicating a complicated politics of knowing. The very category of Aboriginality or Indigeneity arises with colonisation and in reference to incoming or colonising peoples (Langton, 1993, p. 32). In an important sense, then, there were no Aboriginal or Indigenous (or First Nations) peoples in Australia prior to colonisation. Instead, there were – and still are – Kombumerri, or Yolngu or Arrernte, or Bardi, or Yuin people. How, then, should we refer collectively to these and hundreds of other different peoples? This terminological quandary indicates the ways in which (Ab)original ways of knowing and being – in relation to diplomacy and many other matters – have been overrun by and entangled with colonisers' ways of knowing and being through the processes of colonisation. A key challenge and struggle then, especially given the submersion of non-Western forms of diplomacy in dominant discourse, is to find ways to introduce and begin to discuss (Ab)original people's ways of conceptualising and conducting diplomacy that pay due care and respect to human differences while also contending with the realities of settler colonialism.

To attempt to adequately attend to the politics of knowing (Ab)original diplomacy, we first briefly sketch the history of Indigenous diplomacy from colonial frontiers to the Australian Government's recent Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda. We hereby trouble comfortable notions of a progressive movement from the disavowal to the embrace of Indigenous diplomacy, and establish the necessity of a critical political-philosophical approach to understanding political order and inter-polity relations. The second section introduces foundational precepts

underpinning Aboriginal Australian diplomacy by explicating how selves and place are bound with the use of landscape for Aboriginal political ordering. We show that this place-linked form of philosophical relationalism is both intelligible in relation to *and* distant from the precepts that subtend mainstream diplomatic institutions and practices. In the final section, we show how engaging with the original peoples of the Australian continent suggests expanding beyond conventional state-based understandings of diplomacy. This includes suggesting the need to pursue diplomacies among peoples in the context of settler colonialism and diplomacies among species to counter anthropocentric hubris. It also suggests embracing seascapes as much as landscapes in diplomatic imaginations. In doing so, we offer an understanding of (Ab)original people's diplomacy as emplaced in the Oceania region rather than derivative of colonial relations and knowledge.

## A turn to Indigenous diplomacy?

Prior to colonisation and the entanglement of original and introduced political systems on the Australian continent through asymmetric power relations, Indigenous peoples routinely practised diplomatic relations (e.g. see Wheeler, 1910). This foundation naturally led to diplomatic encounters with colonisers on the frontier<sup>1</sup> as well as to diplomatic representations to monarchs and colonial governments, and then to representations to international institutions in the 20th century (for an overview, see Watson, 2015, pp. 2–3; Wilmer, 1993). Amid these relations, there are cases of cross-pollination among introduced and Indigenous political systems.<sup>2</sup> However, most Indigenous diplomatic

---

1 For the North American continent, see Williams (1994).

2 Much has also been made, for instance, of the Iroquois confederacy among nations, the Great Law of Peace, as a source of inspiration of the union leading to the constitution of the United States of America (Miller, 2015; Pratt, 2002, pp. 175–176). Meanwhile, there are instances of recent resurgent diplomatic practice among Indigenous nations that 'have purposely decentered states and have focused on relationships between and for Indigenous nations' (Corn tassel, 2021, p. 83).

practice in Australia, as elsewhere, has been buried under the cover of self-serving historical narratives promulgated by European-derived governments and in mainstream international relations scholarship.

This pattern of European-derived dominance over Indigenous diplomacies ostensibly begins to change in the late 20th century with gradually increasing interest in, and recognition of, Indigenous peoples and diplomacy. In this milieu, Indigenous diplomatic efforts begin to gain traction. This purchase is especially apparent through the United Nations, with the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) representing – for many – a high-water mark for Indigenous diplomacy (see de Costa, 2006; Lightfoot, 2016). In academic publication, an edited collection, *Indigenous diplomacies* curated by Marshall Beier (2009), represents a parallel landmark in scholarship and, as already noted, Indigenous diplomacy is beginning to be explicated and claimed as part of Indigenous resurgence scholarship and practice (e.g. see Cornassel, 2021, p. 83; Simpson, 2017, Chapter 4, pp. 58–63).

In Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) released its Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda in May 2021, ‘to elevate indigenous issues in the work of the foreign affairs and trade portfolio’ (DFAT, 2021). The agenda commits the government to a wide range of laudable actions ranging from calling ‘for international processes and institutions to factor the interests of indigenous peoples into decision-making’ to working ‘with domestic agencies to support Indigenous Australian leaders to engage in the international system’ (2021). These commitments are underscored with the appointment of Australia’s first Ambassador for First Nations People, Justin Mohamed, in April 2023. The Ambassador’s Terms of Reference include ‘Embedding First Nations perspectives into Australia’s foreign policy’ and ‘Progress[ing] First Nations’ rights and interests globally’ (DFAT, 2023).

The foregoing developments form part of the multicultural politics of recognition in liberal societies (Taylor, 1995), thereby offering a tempting and – for many – reassuring narrative about moral progress in international affairs scholarship and practice. In this narrative, Indigenous activists can feel that they are making their voices heard, and settlers living on Indigenous lands can feel confident that their (liberal) society is responsive to difference and is remedying the injustices of the past. This narrative is bolstered by august scholarly credentials of ‘recognition theory’ (e.g. see Honneth, 1994/1995; Young, 1990). However, there are reasons to be sceptical about the politics of recognition. From an Indigenous perspective, Irene Watson notes that ‘recognition only falls to First Nations at the moment we become dispossessed’ (2015, p. 2). This point aligns with Kelly Oliver’s argument that recognition is bound with ontological commitments to a self-contained and selfsame way of being that underpins most Western social theorising (Oliver, 2001, pp. 1–6). While seeking or struggling for recognition seems to make sense, ‘recognition itself is part of the pathology of oppression and domination,’ because ‘only after oppressed people are dehumanized’ through domination do ‘they seek acknowledgment or recognition of their humanity’ (2001, pp. 23–26).

In light of these and cognate critiques of recognition (e.g. Markell, 2003; Povinelli, 1998, 2002), high water marks such as the UNDRIP or developments such as DFAT’s Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda can be read very differently (e.g. King, 2019; Venne, 2011). They can be readily seen as ‘cunning’ devices (Povinelli, 1998) to incorporate alterity and resistance while inoculating dominance against structural changes to address ongoing injustice. Consider, for instance, how the final clauses of the UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007) re-centre the state as the apical political authority. Article 46 states, *inter alia*:

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, people, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to

perform any act contrary to the Charter of the United Nations or construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States. (2007, pp. 28–29)

Of course, part of the cunning of recognition is that developments such as the UNDRIP and DFAT's Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda do also hold meaningful possibilities.

This paradoxical situation – the mingling of the possibility of redressing dominance with the risk of inoculating it against further critique – requires a similarly ambivalent response. We can indeed say that a turn to Indigenous diplomacy is afoot, but it is necessary to add the question mark that we use in the heading for this section. Recent developments *do* represent a turn to Indigenous diplomacy, but these developments arise amid the asymmetry of settler colonial relations and liberal governmentality that tend to simultaneously embrace and neuter difference.

There are various strategies for asserting difference and keeping alive the fuller possibilities of Indigenous diplomacy in this situation. It is possible, for instance, to make an important critical point by laying official pronouncements alongside unofficial counterparts. Where Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong notes that 'the First Nations peoples of this country were this land's first diplomats' (DFAT, 2023), we can add that many First Nations activists and their allies assert that the Australian continent 'Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land'. Cochran and Harding (2022) highlight the tension between these type of pronouncements by pointing to the risks accompanying the 'use the language of indigeneity without embodying it'. This leads them to conclude that a 'truly Indigenous foreign policy' needs to recognise and:

respect Indigenous constitutional orders ... and that those constitutional orders inform the shape and structure of the shared political community [with settlers] rather than being twisted, bent and broken to conform to standards set by the state. (Cochran & Harding, 2022)

To extend and complement this form of critique, our next section introduces the political-philosophical foundations of Aboriginal Australian diplomacy. We take a political-philosophical approach to show that the often naturalised and assumed foundational precepts of European-derived political ordering do not and cannot apply for all peoples. Australia's original peoples independently developed and sustained sophisticated forms of inter-polity political ordering and diplomacy that deserve to be put into exchange with now-dominant introduced counterparts. These ways of ordering polities and managing relations among peoples cannot be subsumed and subordinated to European-derived ways of thinking and operating, because they are qualitatively different, in part because they draw upon different cosmological foundations.

### **Approaching Aboriginal Australian diplomacy**

Aboriginal people of the Australian continent have produced sociopolitical order over tens of thousands of years through a process of evolutionary political design by using landscape as a template. In this system, the beginning of the world for Aboriginal groups lies with a pervading 'everywhen' (Stanner, 1979, p. 24), often parsed as 'the Dreaming' in English, when totemic ancestor figures moved through the landscape, giving the world form, shaping rivers, mountain ranges and particular sites – though details necessarily vary across groups and the continent, and sky and sea, are implicated as well as land. Through this schema, which operates as much in the present as in the past, individuals and groups come into being and are related with each other (though, of

course, individuals may eschew this ordering and the schema has been disrupted and damaged to greater or lesser degrees across the continent through colonialism). In short, an individual's connection with their Dreaming and thus their place/s or range within the landscape – their Country, or 'land already related to people' (Stanner, 1965, p. 14) – provide their sources of order, belonging, jurisdiction and authority.

Conversely, an individual's relationship with their Country rather than other Countries marks out where they do not belong and cannot go. Drawing on her work in the Central Desert and in circumstances where 'land in everyday life' continues to be treated 'as the ancestrally derived locus of Aboriginal law', Nancy Munn (1996, pp. 447, 448) explains how 'spatial interdictions ... create a partially shifting range of excluded or restricted regions for each person throughout his or her life'. Taken together, the combination of interacting Countries and places of belonging and unbelonging generate the need and processes for Aboriginal diplomacy. Diplomatic possibilities are structured by Dreaming tracks – also termed travel lines or songlines (Neale & Kelly, 2020) – of totemic ancestors. Diplomacy, then, involves relations among people bound with and related through Country/landscape. This approach also helps to illuminate that diplomacy, in a generic sense, involves the spacing of people and is not necessarily or only about the state.

The foregoing entrée to Aboriginal Australian diplomacy evokes cosmological and ontological precepts quite radically different from those that underpin mainstream state-linked understandings of diplomacy. The selfhood of Aboriginal political ordering, for instance, is less a bounded centre of cognition and emotion affirmed through identitarian thought and more an emplaced and contextualised being. 'An Aboriginal equivalent of Descartes's 'I think, therefore I am' might be 'I am emplaced, therefore I am' (Brigg & Graham, 2020a). This generates unequivocal ontological security in the individual realm and supports the absence of wars of conquest at the sociopolitical realm,

thus bypassing key preoccupations of European(-derived) traditions. The standing of a polity vis-à-vis landscape is similarly radically different. Here polity is not configured through control and command-obedience power relations linked with the exercise of sovereignty, but through sites in the landscape imbued with ancestral power (see Brigg & Graham, 2020b). These precepts give rise to institutions and practices of diplomacy among groups such as the passing of messages, waiting on the outskirts of a camp for signals or invitations to enter, and various forms of conflict processing (e.g. see Wheeler, 1910). These are in turn supported by linked institutions (e.g. for running ceremonies, managing land-based resources) that produce interdependence and complementarity rather than inscribing categorical differences that risk irreconcilable division (cf. Brigg & Graham, 2021; Elkin, 1931, p. 197; Rose, 2013).

The way we have presented Aboriginal Australian political ordering and diplomacy thus far is broadly intelligible to the European-infused social science knower – we have identified substantial differences but aim for accessibility in the first instance. Our evocation of Aboriginal selfhood might allow it to be understood, for instance, as akin yet slightly differently configured to European understandings of selfhood as a stable and ‘distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes’ (Geertz, 1979, p. 229). And the linking of polities to parts of the landscape (albeit through ancestors) where people do and do not belong (and thus can and cannot freely travel) can broadly approximate European understandings of ‘territory’. Is it possible, though, that these familiar certainties also deserve to be unsettled?

Nancy Munn explains that consideration of belonging and unbelonging in Aboriginal law is bound with ‘a complex kind of relative spacetime, not simply a set of determinate locales or “places”’ (1996, p. 449). Here ‘spacetime’ refers to ‘a symbolic nexus of relations produced out of interactions between bodily actors and terrestrial spaces’ (1996, p. 449). Already, then, there are hints that both selfhood and territory may not be quite what the European-infused social science knower imagines. On

the first count, locatedness is key, with the body and self operating as a 'spatial field [that] embraces changes with the mobile actor from one "moment" to the next' (1996, p. 451). A self may have power to speak or act in one setting (or Country), for instance, but not in another. In effect, the self changes as it moves through space and in relation to place; selfhood is contextual in ways that require further adjustment or disruption of dominant European-derived understandings of selfhood.

Similarly with place/territory, and contrary to understandings that can be facilitated through the European-derived native title regime, Aboriginal estates and the powerful places that give rise to them are not clearly bounded or discrete. Rather, the influence of powerful sites radiates outward 'to vague peripheries' (1996, pp. 451, 454). We see the relational completion of this system (between actors/selves and places) in Munn's observation that 'places are the topographic remnants of the centered fields of ancient actors' (1996, p. 454). She reflects that the:

transformations of ancestors' bodies ... are not simply their bodies in some generalized sense but situated bodies in particular stances or states, such as lying down, sitting dancing, standing and looking at something, or scattered into fragments from a fight – all forms conveying some momentary action or participation in events at a given location. (1996, p. 454)

Overall, then, the foundational precepts that subtend Aboriginal Australian diplomatic institutions and practices are philosophically different and distant from the those that inform the everyday mainstream and dominant state-linked understandings of political order and diplomacy that are likely to be mobilised within and by DFAT. In the Aboriginal Australian approach, a place-linked form of philosophical relationalism (Brigg & Graham, 2020c) helps to manage the spacing out of peoples, including through cross-cutting devices for establishing

interdependence rather than difference across social categories and groupings. Our goal here, though, is not to seek to establish an ontological gulf that would suggest that understanding and accommodation across these two 'worlds' is impossible. The fact of this writing militates against such an understanding. Rather, our purpose is to highlight the depth of creativity, imagination and persistence that is required – especially amid the grossly asymmetric power relations of settler colonialism – to deliver a meaningful exchange between Aboriginal Australian diplomacies and their state-linked counterparts under the banner of DFAT's Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda or similar ventures.

### **For expansive Oceanic diplomacy**

The increasing recognition of Indigenous peoples and diplomacy holds significant promise for expanding our thinking about diplomacy and creating exchange among diverse peoples. However, the asymmetries and power relations that flow from colonialism mean that these possibilities, and particularly the accompanying possibility of redressing dominance, are tempered and confounded by the ways that recognition can inoculate dominance against critique. The power relations at play make it quite possible, for instance, for Indigenous diplomacies to be mobilised to serve the ends of European-derived state dominance while assuaging the guilt of colonisers with little meaningful change in diplomatic practice or political relations. To respond to this paradoxical challenge requires more than the participation of Aboriginal people or engaging with diplomacy at the level of practices. One way to help support meaningful engagement with Aboriginal diplomacy is by engaging with political-philosophical foundational precepts to support mutual learning about – and the expansion of – approaches to diplomacy in the Oceania region.

Aboriginal Australian peoples constitute an old society that lived in relative isolation from the wider world for tens of thousands of years. This long-term experiment in human order-making allowed people the opportunity to slowly develop ways of relating with the land and

each other. The spectacular timescales that are involved see Aboriginal political order emerge gradually through a process of evolutionary political design that may be something like what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson calls '*thinking in formation*' (Simpson, 2017, p. 37, emphasis in original). The accompanying system of political order devised ways to account for and manage the wildcard of the human ego and survivalist human behaviours as well as to allow for personal and group autonomy while providing important collective public goods including security (Brigg et al., 2022). Some conflict – most notably wars of conquest over territory – are 'managed out' through this system, but Aboriginal people are not intrinsically peaceful as is sometimes imagined by some Europeans. Killings, raids and feuds are documented in the ethnographic record and in some of the old Dreaming stories (Warner, 1958, pp. 144–79) as is the use of physical violence to process disputes and restore personal or clan dignity and autonomy (Macdonald, 1990).

Despite Aboriginal Australian peoples' great age and familiarity with conflict, including violence, it seems that they did not foresee or account for the impending challenge of the forms of wholesale, unequivocal and immoral violence wielded by colonisers. While these forms of violence have been analysed and reflected upon by Aboriginal people (see Rose, 1984), violence as conquest represents an existential-psychological shock for people sprung from Country. Aboriginal diplomacy has thus had to begin the work of pursuing diplomatic relations with colonisers whose conduct and way of relating to Country is immoral (Rose, 1984). Here it is not enough to rely upon colonisers' conceptual frameworks and systems of diplomacy. This system of governance and the settler behaviour it engenders is in many respects 'wild ... or feral ... in Aboriginal terms' (Brigg et al., 2019, p. 430); it is not governed by lawful relations to Country.

From an Aboriginal perspective, there is a primary need, then, to expand understandings of diplomacy beyond those conventionally prescribed by international relations scholarship and the dominant society to deal

with the violence of settler colonialism and the ongoing presence of settlers on Aboriginal land. From colonial frontiers to the present day, many Aboriginal people and groups have attempted Aboriginal-led diplomacy with colonisers. This underappreciated empirical history signals one dimension of the necessary expansion of understandings of diplomacy. In the Australian (and similar) settings it is necessary to begin to think of diplomacy among polities within a country that is usually assumed to be a singular actor. But this expansion cannot be reduced to diplomatic practices. In parallel, there is a need to consider the politico-philosophical basis of Aboriginal-led diplomatic practice indicated in the previous section. This may include, for instance, the principle of recognising and creating of interdependence across difference. One recent distilled expression of this principle comes through the Miyarrka Media suggestion that settlers and First Nations people can relate in Australia as together but different (Gurumuruwuy et al., 2019).

Aboriginal approaches to diplomacy also suggest other forms of expansiveness, too. Totemic ancestor figures connect people not only with place and landscape as a template for political ordering, but also with other species. The co-author of this chapter, Mary Graham, belongs to the Kombumerri people, who tell a story of the relationship between humans and dolphins. These two (humans and dolphins) would regularly fish together. Dolphins would herd fish to the shore, humans would net them and provide part of the catch to the dolphins. But the humans began to neglect to share the catch, taking all the fish for themselves. Then one day the dolphins disappeared and did not return. That is all that happened. There is obviously a relational message here about complementarity and mutual benefit across species difference. But, Mary observes, the story is not didactic; there is no moralising in the (re)telling. People are invited to find their own way of conducting themselves and engaging with difference in a relational cosmos. This cross-species diplomacy offers one way of pursuing a much-needed counter to anthropocentric hubris; a means of coming 'down to earth'

(Latour, 2017/2018) and being worthy of what is proper in a deeply interconnected world.

Finally, while our introductory political-philosophical sketch of the foundations of Aboriginal diplomacy illustrates Aboriginal political ordering by referring to landscape, sky (skyscape) and sea (seascape) are also implicated as indicated by the Kombumerri dolphin story immediately above. ‘Sea Country’ suggests both a connection to other peoples represented in this volume for whom sea is thoroughly generative and the need for a further expansion of how diplomacy is conceptualised. Where conventional diplomacy has tended to be focused upon the territorially bound land masses, thereby casting seas into the shadows, the philosophical relationalism underpinning Indigenous diplomacy suggests a different relation. Sea unfolds to land and land to sea, just as dolphins to humans and vice versa. This relational symmetry evokes a sisterly inversion that gives both ways. In the context of the relations of the wider region, the diplomacy of original peoples of the Australian continent deserves, as we noted in opening, to be considered as part of Oceanic diplomacy rather than in terms of the conventional colonial-derived descriptors that we have used throughout. We look forward to the further mutual exploration of diverse diplomacies to contribute to the recuperation and development of the diplomacies of the (Ab)original peoples of the Australian continent as part of Oceanic diplomacies.

## References

- Beier, J. M. (Ed.). (2009). *Indigenous diplomacies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brigg, M., & Graham, M. (2020a). *The relevance of Aboriginal political concepts (3): Autonomous selfhood*. ABC Religion and Ethics. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/aboriginal-political-concepts-autonomous-selfhood/12472310>

- Brigg, M., & Graham, M. (2020b). *The relevance of Aboriginal political concepts (5): Country, Place, and territory*. ABC Religion and Ethics. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/aboriginal-political-concepts-country-place-territory/12815608>
- Brigg, M., & Graham, M. (2020c). *The relevance of Aboriginal political concepts (6): Relationalism, not sovereignty*. ABC Religion and Ethics. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/aboriginal-political-philosophy-relationalism/12954274>
- Brigg, M., & Graham, M. (2021). *The relevance of Aboriginal political concepts (7): Autonomous regard*. ABC Religion and Ethics. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/aboriginal-political-concepts-autonomous-regard/13472098>
- Brigg, M., Graham, M., & Murphy, L. (2019). Toward the dialogical study of politics: Hunting at the fringes of Australian political science. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 54(3), 423–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2019.1625863>
- Brigg, M., Graham, M., & Weber, M. (2022). Relational Indigenous systems: Aboriginal Australian political ordering and reconfiguring IR. *Review of International Studies*, 48(5), 891–909. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000425>
- Cochran, N., & Harding, B. (2022). *What is Indigenous foreign policy? Lessons from Australia and New Zealand*. United States Institute of Peace.
- Corntassel, J. (2021). Life beyond the state: Regenerating Indigenous international relations and everyday challenges to settler colonialism. *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, 1, 71–97.
- de Costa, R. (2006). *A higher authority: Indigenous transnationalism and Australia*. UNSW Press.

- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2021). *Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/indigenous-diplomacy-agenda>
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2023). *Expression of interest: Australia's Ambassador for First Nations People*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-ambassador-first-nations-people.pdf>
- Elkin, A. P. (1931). The Kopara: The settlement of grievances. *Oceania*, 2(2), 191–198. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.1931.tb01665.x>
- Geertz, C. (1979). From the native's point of view: On the nature of anthropological understanding. In P. Rabinow & W. M. Sullivan (Eds.), *Interpretive social science: A reader* (pp. 225–241). University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520340343-008>
- Gurumuruwuy, P., Deger, J., Gurunulmiwuy, E., Balpatji, W., Balanydjarrk, M., Ganambarr, J., & Djingadjingawuy, K. (2019). *Phone & spear: A Yuta anthropology*. Goldsmiths Press.
- Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts* (J. Anderson, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 1994)
- King, H. (2019). *UNDRIP's fundamental flaw*. Open Canada. <https://opencanada.org/undrips-fundamental-flaw/>
- Langton, M. (1993). "Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television ...": *An essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things*. Australian Film Commission.
- Latour, B. (2018). *Down to earth: Politics in the new climatic regime*. (C. Porter, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 2017)

- Lightfoot, S. (2016). *Global Indigenous politics: A subtle revolution*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315670669>
- Macdonald, G. (1990). Where words harm and blows heal. *Australian Dispute Resolution Journal*, 1(3), 125–132.
- Mair, V. H. (Ed.). (2006). *Contact and exchange in the ancient world*. University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824841676>
- Markell, P. (2003). *Bound by recognition*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400825875>
- Miller, R. J. (2015). American Indian constitutions and their influence on the United States constitution. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 159(1), 32–56. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2739936>
- Munn, N. (1996). Excluded spaces: The figure in the Australian Aboriginal landscape. *Critical Inquiry*, 22(3), 446–465. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448801>
- Neale, M., & Kelly, L. (2020). *Songlines: The power and promise*. Thames & Hudson Australia.
- Numelin, R. J. (1950). *The beginnings of diplomacy: A sociological study of intertribal and international relations*. Munksgaard.
- Oliver, K. (2001). *Witnessing: Beyond recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Povinelli, E. A. (1998). The cunning of recognition: Real being and Aboriginal recognition in settler Australia. *The Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 11(1), 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13200968.1998.11077279>
- Povinelli, E. A. (2002). *The cunning of recognition: Indigenous alterities and the making of Australian multiculturalism*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383673>

- Pratt, S. L. (2002). *Native pragmatism: Rethinking the roots of American philosophy*. Indiana University Press.
- Rose, D. B. (1984). The saga of Captain Cook: Morality in Aboriginal and European law. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, (2), 24–39.
- Rose, D. B. (2013). Common property regimes in Aboriginal Australia: Totemism revisited. In P. Lamour (Ed.), *The governance of common property in the Pacific region* (pp. 127–143). ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/GCPPR.03.2013>
- Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt1pwt77c>
- Stanner, W. E. H. (1965). Aboriginal territorial organization: Estate, range, domain and regime. *Oceania*, 36(1): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.1965.tb00275.x>
- Stanner, W. E. H. (1979). *White man got no dreaming: Essays, 1938–1973*. ANU Press.
- Taylor, C. (1995). The politics of recognition. In A. Gutman (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of recognition* (pp. 25–73). Princeton University Press.
- United Nations. (2007). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. A/61/L.67.
- Venne, S. H. (2011). The road to the United Nations and rights of Indigenous peoples. *Griffith Law Review*, 20(3), 557–577. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10383441.2011.10854710>
- Warner, W. L. (1958). *A black civilization: A social study of an Australian tribe*. Harper.

- Watson, I. (2015). *Aboriginal peoples, colonialism and international law: Raw Law*. Routledge.
- Wheeler, G. C. (1910). *The tribe, and intertribal relations in Australia*. J. Murray Johnson.
- Williams, R. A. (1994). Linking arms together: Multicultural constitutionalism in a North American indigenous vision of law and peace. *California Law Review*, 82(4), 981–1049. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3480938>
- Wilmer, F. (1993). *The indigenous voice in world politics: Since time immemorial*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483326610>
- Wong, P. (2023, March 7). *Opening remarks Coral Bell School inaugural annual lecture on Indigenous Diplomacy, Australian National University, Canberra. Minister for Foreign Affairs* [Speech transcript]. <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/transcript/opening-remarks-coral-bell-school-inaugural-annual-lecture-indigenous-diplomacy-australian-national-university-canberra>
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton University Press.



# 7

## ***Popo and supu* diplomacy in the modern state of Solomon Islands**

GORDON LEUA NANAU<sup>1</sup>

From the *nughu* (gravel bar) of the Lathi River, Guadalcanal, one can see from a distance the magnificent sight of Mount Popomanaseu. It is the highest peak on the island and entire Solomon Islands. Indigenous Guadalcanal inhabitants call it *popo-mana-seu* in reference to *popo* (wooden food bowl) and *seu niu* (coconut shell spoon), as it resembles these important utensils from a distance. Why is such a name given to a peak that stands out from the other mountain ranges on Guadalcanal? On deeper reflection, the name matches the central role that *popo mana seu* and *supu*<sup>2</sup> (heap of root crops) play in Guadalcanal intertribal and inter-clan etiquette and diplomacy.

The chapter explores the centrality of *popo* and *supu* making, display and presentation in social interactions and diplomatic engagements

---

1 Gordon Leua Nanau is a Lengo speaker from Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands.

2 In the other languages of Guadalcanal, it is spelt with a 'ch' or a 'ts' instead of 's' and pronounced as *chupu* or *tsupu*.

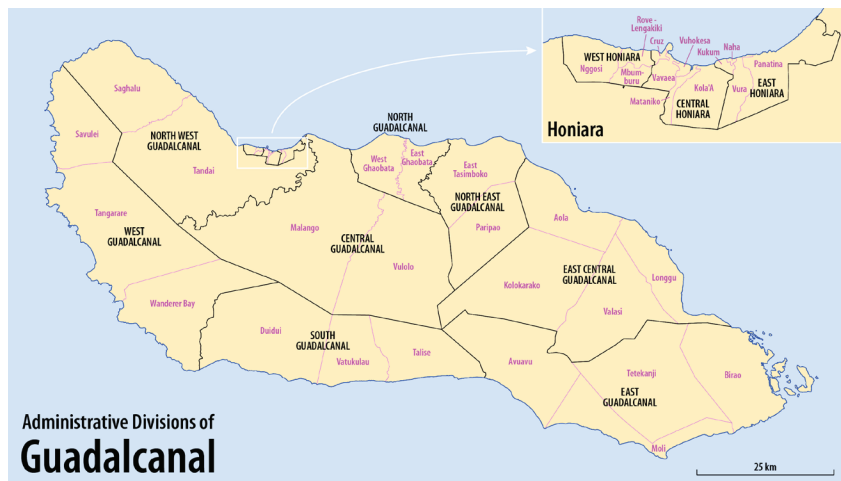
among indigenous Guadalcanal people and beyond. It looks at the significance of the wooden food bowl, the coconut spoon and related local valuables such as *rongo vatu* (shell money), *be* (pigs) and *vanga* (root and fruit crops, or foodstuffs in general). The popo and supu processes of diplomacy are active in Lengo and between Guadalcanal tribes more generally. The modern state of Solomon Islands also increasingly calls on both practices in its interactions and efforts to resolve differences between *wantok* groups (groups that speak the same language), to commemorate important events, build new relationships or reinvigorate existing ones.

## The Lengo region of Guadalcanal

The cultural region of Guadalcanal referenced in this chapter is commonly called Lengo, comprising North, North East and parts of East Central Guadalcanal, in the current constituency demarcation of the island province. People who live in this cultural region speak a language called Lengo or Doku. Rarely has anybody written on this region of Guadalcanal, despite it being the centre of change and a cultural crossroad. Lengo speakers had early contact with people coming from and speaking the languages of Gela, Bughotu, Ghari, Malango, Birao, Talise, Longgu and 'Are'are (Unga, 2008, p. 213). Indeed, certain Lengo speakers still maintain some relational connections to these languages, places and islands.

Interestingly, Guadalcanal folklore and genealogies would mostly trace their genealogical roots and routes to Vatuposau or somewhere close to Mount Popomanaseu. In conjunction with Tandai and the area of Malango and Belaha, Lengo is host to several companies, government projects, plantations, schools, migrant settlements and Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands. I have learnt extensively about Guadalcanal *kastom* (custom) and traditions from elder relatives and leaders. Moreover, I have lived it long enough to qualify to make informed commentaries on the Indigenous diplomacy of this region of Guadalcanal.

FIGURE 13: CONSTITUENCIES AND WARDS OF GUADALCANAL



Source: Adapted from a map by M. Dörrbecker, Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_Administrative\\_Divisions\\_of\\_Guadalcanal\\_\(Solomon\\_Islands\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Administrative_Divisions_of_Guadalcanal_(Solomon_Islands).png)). CC BY-SA 2.5.

## Lengo social organisation

Among Lengo speakers, there are five *kema* (tribes). These *kema* fall in two categories: *kema sule* (big tribe) and *kema pile* or *kema kiki* (small tribe). The five *kema* in Lengo are Ghaobata, Lathi, Nekama, Thimbo and Thongo. These *kema* are bigger groupings that all persons whose grandmothers and mothers are indigenous to Guadalcanal would be members of by birth.

Below the *kema* are *mamata* (clans). Some also refer to these as *ulunibeti*, literally meaning heads of streams. If you can picture it from that perspective, two big rivers resemble the *kema sule* and *kema kiki*; the five *kema* would be five streams coming out of the two big rivers and the *mamata* or *ulunibeti* would be the many tributaries coming out of the streams connected to the two rivers. The *mamata* have identifiable *maneka* or *manesule* (big-men) heading them, and these leaders also have land, property or user rights over certain areas.

A *vanua* or *komu* (place, surrounding or wider community) comprises several hamlets. The *vanua* or *komu* has families and individuals who are members of different *kema* and *mamata* coexisting and interacting daily. It follows that parents in any village would be members of different *kema* and *mamata*. Marrying into the same *kema* is prohibited, although on very rare occasions, it happens; while marrying into the same *mamata* is unimaginable and considered *sio* (incest).

The protocols for relating to and behaving towards another person in the *vanua* or *komu* depend on one's relational connections. These are not explicitly written rules, but are prescribed by culture and tradition, and are learnt through oral tradition and practice. At the level of *vanua* or *komu*, there is also a *maneka* (big-man) and *ghaoka sule* (big-woman) who people go to when faced with problems. Women determine *kema* and *mamata* membership, because Lengo, like most of Guadalcanal, is matrilineal but patrilocal, where women move to their husband's place of residence after marriage.

In the *vanua* or *komu*, there is a system of gendered and generational demarcation of work and responsibilities. The *maneka* is often responsible for the *kema* in the village (*maneka ni kema*); the *mamata* (*maneka ni mamata*); the *vanua* (*maneka ni komu*); and head of landowning *mamata* (*maneka logho pari*). There are also *ghaoka sule* (big-women) in these communities, mostly at the *mamata* and *komu* levels. Rights to land and livelihoods are connected through the mother in respective *mamata*. How communities operate on a day-to-day basis is mostly in the hands of women, with support from *uluvaolu* (young boys) and *gari maukoni* (young girls). There are protocols regarding how *uluvaolu* interact with their mothers and sisters, and vice-versa. Protocols of courtship and marriage also exist, as will be explained in a hypothetical case below, but these are increasingly being eroded by modern approaches to courtship and marriage. Consequently, arranged marriages are mostly a thing of the past.

It is under this social structure and organisation that diplomatic and relational interactions take place. Let me now provide an overview of the spirit of popo and supu making, and their central roles in Lengo diplomacy.

## Popo and supu making

In traditional Lengo communities, popo (wooden bowls) of varying sizes and *seu niu* (spoons made of coconut shells) or spoons made from *tue* (freshwater clam shells) are utensils seen in many kitchens. Popo have been used as cooking pots and serving dishes since long ago and *seu niu* remains a handy serving and eating spoon despite the availability of modern metal and plastic spoons. Popo were central to the survival of the people in early Lengo society, as they used them to prepare food, *gura gole* (cook vegetables) and serve cooked food. Popo, *seu niu* and, to an extent, *silenge* (baskets made of coconut leaves used to serve baked or roast food) are therefore common signs of the hospitality and attention people render to each other daily. People with limited numbers of popo could easily be regarded as having lower standing. Like the outward sign of the highest peak, Popomanaseu, they are outward signs of family integrity, decency and hope.

Moving beyond the household and family setting, popo offering and presentation (always comprising cooked food inside the popo) and supu (comprising mostly uncooked root crops, fruits and pigs) are central to public events. During *tabatu* (feasts to build status and fame) and *vangakolu* (communal feasts), one's commitment towards the host in staging the event is shown by the size of popo and forms of decorations around the popo displaying parcels of cooked food, fruits, sugarcane and live pigs. The local unit of measurement for the size of a popo is the *iti* (stretched thumb and middle finger). Therefore, if the size of the popo is *iti lima* (five stretched thumbs and middle fingers), that means it is five times that measurement. The higher the number of *iti*, the taller and larger (circumference) of the popo! The number and size of popo and pigs displayed in a feast indicates the prestige and success of the event.

Some events – particularly those that aim to solve minor problems, compensation (such as for swearing) and reconciliations to rebuild relationship after family quarrels – would require a *supu* of *rara vangagea* (uncooked bananas, yams, green coconuts, sugarcane, betel nuts etc.) together with live pigs. In Lengo, a *supu* is for lower-order urgent events, while a *popo* is a higher-order ceremony that takes time to prepare. There are events where both *popo* and *supu* are required of some people, especially if it is to reconcile disputes that have resulted in serious injury or death. In such instances, the *popo* and *supu* are presented together with *rongo vatu* and, increasingly, modern legal tender.

### **Reciprocity – maintaining friendly relations and networks**

Feasts (such as mortuary feasts or feasts for status building, compensation, weddings or other celebrations) are ceremonial and reciprocal in nature. Lengo speakers contribute towards feasts with a deep sense of commitment and desire to underwrite the success of a relative. In addition, they do not expect a verbal thank you or an immediate token of appreciation from the person or family they assist. It is not a sign of ungraciousness but a deep cultural understanding that times and events will transpire when this kind-hearted gesture is reciprocated. A prominent leader and writer from Lengo explained this arguing that just because there are no words for ‘thank you’ in Lengo, apart from *doku* (good); it does not indicate an ungrateful society:

Gratefulness, sharing and giving are a way of life, accepted and practiced almost unconsciously by all. When I give, I have the satisfaction of giving in a continuation of friendly relations. I wouldn’t expect a verbal ‘thank you’ [or immediate reciprocation] because thankfulness is seen in deeds rather than in words. (Bugotu, 1968, p. 68)

Reciprocity is at the core of Guadalcanal culture and, more broadly, of Melanesian and Pacific societies. People give, share and assist each other

through physical work (such as house construction or the cultivation and planting of yam), social commitments (taking care of little children) or with food for feasts. Such gestures do not create any immediate need for recompense. The giver knows deep within that it is a cultural obligation and has certainty and conviction that it will be returned in kind sooner or later in some form. There is no count kept of acts of doing good to support another, no matter how many times genuine service is rendered to fellow community members.

This fits in well with Christian teachings of stewardship and service. *Thaidu* (working together and sharing land space, labour and food) and *vangalaka* (generosity and kindness) are intrinsic qualities of Lengo society. As such, when missionary teachings of service, caring and stewardship came, they were accommodated, as they complement local protocols. Quite often, one hears this prayer uttered in Melanesian churches of Guadalcanal:

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give, and not to count the cost, to fight, and not to heed the wounds, to toil, and not to seek for rest, to labor, and not to ask for reward, except that of knowing that we are doing your will. (Tylenda, 1985)

This succinctly summarises relational practices of Lengo speakers prior to missionary teaching. It is still evident in their present day-to-day endeavours.

This attitude of giving more than receiving is often clearly demonstrated in feasts and feast giving. In *vangakolu*, there are usually two categories of feasts – *thara* and *tuva komu*. The *thara*, often referred to as an island feast, is where food is unwrapped and displayed on a long *bela* (table) or on an open space covered with coconut fronds and leaves. People then sit along the *bela* or on arranged leaves and partake in the feast. A modern version of this *thara* is the establishment of *voutha* (stalls), where people

from specific parts of the community and from distant places and islands are directed to get their share of food, usually served in *lobo* or *silenge* (two types of coconut woven baskets used to serve food in Lengo). The *voutha* is a recent introduction that came with new communities such as boarding schools. *Vangakolu* utilising the *tuva komu* approach is the primary way of feasting in Lengo. Usually feast givers acknowledge every single individual that come into the village for the *sarakolu* (get-together or feast). They then redistribute the food in *tunuva* (shares or portions) covering all villages that are represented in the crowd. Even if only one person from a faraway place is there, a *tunuva* must be offered to that person. This is critical for the *atha doku* (good name) of the feast giver and host community when visitors return to their homes. Giving and sharing is a sign of the level of care and genuineness. The true test of authenticity and genuine service is in the process of sharing itself, where feast givers are usually the last to take their share. This is regarded a sign of strength, discipline, *vangelaka* (generosity) and the display of servant leadership. The opposite would be *tuvathage* (sharing inward or selfishness), an act deeply despised by Lengo society.

## Bridal exchanges

In Guadalcanal, reciprocity can be understood by taking stock of the number of generous activities that an individual or mamata has done towards one's family, which then translates into day-to-day relationships. Here is a hypothetical case to demonstrate this. Young Lau is interested in a girl and is at the point of no return, meaning that marriage may be the ultimate outcome. In normal situations, both families would have engaged in *bosatenga* (verbal communication), *rorongo* (attentive listening) and *talamaghi* (agreements in principle). Lau's father and maternal uncles especially (and to a lesser extent, his paternal uncles) would mastermind arrangements towards the bride prize ceremony. In the process of finalising valuables for the bridal exchange, individuals, families and kema or mamata members who have been assisted one way

or the other by very close relatives of young Lau would come forward and give their *thathanga* (assistance or contributions). It does not really matter whether young Lau's uncle, grandfather, great grandfather or aunties assisted those concerned a few years back or decades earlier, they will assist, usually with strings of shell money (*aloalo*), pigs, cash (which is now a part of cultural exchanges) or in kind through *ghairau* (feast preparation). Ultimately, the father and uncles may only facilitate the ceremony, but the contributions would come from the community and from close and distant relatives. The spirit and life of reciprocity emerge and is sustained in such situations. Thus, reciprocity cannot be divorced from general livelihood in Lengo and Guadalcanal societies. There is a generally accepted principle expressed as *e tabu na vare* (it is iniquitous not to assist). The worldview of the Lengo speakers is that what goes around comes around, so look out for those around you and support them when need be.

There is a misunderstanding, especially among non-indigenous scholars, anthropologists and evangelical Christians, that sees exchanging a bride prize as a transactional act of selling and buying. While that may be true in certain modern instances (because of the extraordinary demand for cash), in many indigenous societies, who appreciate and acknowledge the basis for such transactions, bridal exchanges create bonds and may rejuvenate old, withering links. It is a diplomatic gesture to create new bonds of relational alliances. It is also a moment of uncertainty, just as in a wedding ceremony in a Christian church or in a civil wedding carried out by modern magistrates or courts. In Guadalcanal kastom, there is a possibility that the valuables – such as currency, popo, *vanga-gea* (uncooked food), *vanga-maotha* (cooked food) plus other necessities – may be rejected during the exchange when Lau's family (from the hypothetical story above) put them forth. There may even be additional demands that must be met before the relatives of the bride accept the exchange.

In very rare situations, a bride prize agreed upon in principle (*talamaghi*) during the period of *bosatenga* and *rorongo* may be rejected and the situation may develop into other challenges not covered in this chapter. Indeed, bridal exchanges are a legitimate form of wedding in Guadalcanal, and the valuables exchanged are usually displayed for the public to witness, appreciate and celebrate. In the modern (Judeo-Christian) tradition, there is a time in church during the wedding where the celebrant (a priest or bishop) asks whether anyone in the congregation disapproves of the marriage. Similarly, with the Guadalcanal bridal exchange, there are instances, although they are rare, where someone in the crowd will disapprove of the marriage. An objection in either situation could be spontaneous or may stem from historical issues. Even if there is a last-minute rejection, whoever is present to witness the *pepelu* (bride prize) and *taulaghi* (marriage) will share from the popo prepared for the event.

### Caring and looking out for each other

Reciprocity in Lengo and Guadalcanal more generally have extended implications in terms of *manatha* (knowledge) and *lavipangoti* (looking out for each other, for visitors and for the marginalised). In the case of young Lau above, assuming that there were no problems and he legitimately marries, the connections created in that one marriage would have a ripple effect. Lau's family and his wife's relatives are connected through the bridal exchange. It seals the bond, and relatives therefore have the responsibility of supporting the new couple to raise a family. They will not be left on their own, because the diplomatic gesture offered during that bridal exchange is that of reciprocity. Those who assisted are obligated to ensure that Lau or his wife do not in any way disgrace the newly created network and extended family. Reciprocity has wider implications that are so intrinsically linked that one person's problem becomes everybody's concern. This is true for good times and bad times! It means that they would look out for each other in all times of need, struggles and celebrations. The terms for this in the Lengo language are *vi goni'i* or *vi loghoi'i* (caring for or 'owning' each other).

## Demonstration of status and fame

Feast giving, hosting and display of decorated popo with food, fruits and live pigs is often seen as a physical demonstration of the status and popularity of a leader of the mamata or *tuanitina* who contribute it. Feasts in Lengo are initiated to commemorate something or celebrate an event or stage in life. Some events – including initiation events such as *uthuuthu* (body marking) of teenage girls transitioning into adulthood – are no longer practised, since early Christian missionaries prohibited them as evil. These are occasional events that *maneka* (big-men) use to call people together by hosting feasts. The planning, preparation and execution of a feast to celebrate certain life events is often intertwined with a display of status and authority. The level of sophistication and detail in the display of popo and supu represents the extent of power and status of the person masterminding it. Food is at the centre of cultural activities, and how it is shared usually depicts also the personal qualities of the feast giver.

Guadalcanal society privileges communal identities and relationships over individual identity. As such, the same fame and status accorded to the leader of a given mamata is accorded to members of the group for a particular event or act of reciprocated support. Therefore, women, their children and their extended family group's status is elevated through the display of the size of the popo and pigs and the complexity of the decorations on the popo of their husbands, fathers, *manesule* (leaders) or mamata. The respect rendered to females and young members of the mamata stems from the status, fame and respect accorded to the mamata and not necessarily to them as individuals.

It is important to highlight that the image of mamata, kema and *taba-ni-vure* (extended family) is indirectly at stake when it is represented with a popo contribution during feasts. Gender, generational and status differences are of little consideration, since most members of the mamata would have contributed towards a common outcome. It is usually very

democratic, as members of the family would have had discussions earlier to decide on whether to support a *tabatu* or *sarakolu*. The process of *ghairau* (feast preparations) usually requires similar contributions in terms of food produced and labour, and where appropriate, a member who has a pig to offer on behalf of the group can do so. The head of the mamata or *tamadae* is usually responsible for securing animals appropriate for the popo size. It is usually a group effort, for the name and fame of the group, rather than being about individuals or based on gendered demarcations.

All gatherings of significance must have a display of cooked food presented in decorated popo, especially with betel nut fruits and *tovu* (sugarcane), and various types, compositions and shapes of pudding made of *tavioka* and *kakake* (giant swamp taro), *pana* (yam), *roso* (green coconuts), and *tatau* (megapode eggs) where available. The longer the rows of popo displayed, the greater the complexity and contents of popo decorations, and the greater the size and number of pigs displayed and slaughtered during the feast, the more prestigious and highly regarded it is.

Diplomacy and diplomatic relations are maintained, extended and created during such events over popo display and feasting. All contributions that go to any feast will be recorded and kept for future reference, even if the 'inspectors' do not carry with them notebooks and pens. They would know exactly who brought what, the *iti* (sizes) of popo and number of pigs, and have an estimate of how many people brought the contribution. Such events are also used for social bonding and development of new relationships, and opportunities to catch up with relatives and extended family members who may reside in very distant villages or in other parts of the island.

The way food is redistributed and shared to all who attend the feast is a deeply diplomatic act. Whether a feast is *doku* (good) or *thaghata* (bad) is often assessed by how food is shared. All groups that contribute to the

feast always have a share of what they bring to the feast returned to them. This is known as *olioli* (to return), where a portion of the contribution given by a group is returned to them to feed members of their team while they wait for a bigger share in the feast. In the situation where *na maurie* (live contribution) is the requirement, each contributing group would be advised to slaughter and process the animal by themselves and would be given instructions on what portion of the animal to retain and what to deliver to the host with the popo. For example, the host may ask the contributors to slaughter and share the animal as per *kalapalu*. To a Lengo speaker, *kalapalu* means that the giver is expected to slaughter the animal and keep the head and one of the front legs. The rest of the animal and meat is given to the host to *tuvalia* (redistribute or share) between all communities represented at the feast and visitors. At very large feasts, there is *popo ni sarakolu* (welcome popo). Food from the *popo ni sarakolu* is eaten while the bigger share of food is organised and redistributed. This sharing of food can go on for hours until every group is served.

It is regarded as shameful if, after the feast, some visitors or communities have missed out on a share. The number of people helping and accommodated during the process of *ghairau* (feast preparation) is an indication of one's hospitality and care. More importantly, the sharing of food must be seen as generous (*vangalaka*) and not *tuvathaghe* (retaining most of the food in the host's house). *Tuvathaghe* or *tuvangola* (selfish, unfair or greedy division of food) is one of the most dreadful 'sins' in Lengo feasting. The diplomatic functions of popo and supu giving are to strengthen relationships, open dialogue, reconcile conflicting parties, expand networks and accumulate prestige that could be useful in the future.

## **Conflict, reconciliation and order**

Popo and supu play key roles in negotiations, arbitration and reconciliation to ensure peace and order. Feasts and food exchanges are central to problem-solving and making amends in conflictual

situations. Food display can be a show of power, status, fame, humility and celebration but it can also be a sign of remorse, forgiveness and reconciliation. Where there is deep antagonism over serious issues and blood is shed, *rongo vatu*, popo, pigs and, nowadays, cash are usually the respectable way to put an end to such disputes, following very elaborate and intense negotiations. For instance, if an individual is injured during a dispute, the ceremony that takes place is called *unu ghabu* (cleaning or wiping off blood) or *thui lova* or *ulu* (excusing one's head). In the first context, the person who inflicted injury will deliver a popo, *be* (pigs) and *rongo* to 'clean the blood' off the victim. In other words, genuine apology and remorse is shown through deeds, as words alone are insufficient to demonstrate remorse nor acquiescence to the negotiated reparations.

In the second situation where blood is spilt or life lost, and revenge the most likely route for the victim's *tuanitina* and *mamata*, two appropriate forms of redress are *vuli ngara* (washing of injury) or *thuiulu* (removing one's head from the hanger). Again, it is in the form of popo and supu together with *rongo vatu*, *be* and *vanga*, following careful mediation and negotiations by neutral individuals or groups accepted by both parties to the conflict.

Individuals or groups who mediate in such risky situations usually have good relationships with both parties through marriage or historical links or because they are prominent persons from neighbouring communities. The same principle applies to other categories of offences against kastom, such as *rughu* (adultery), *vilavi* (elopement), *gito* (theft), *salepo* or *bosa thaghata* (swearing), or *tuvi venu* (males stalking females). In these other offences, except for *rughu* (which is a very serious societal crime), preparation and presentation of supu (*rara vanga gea*) is usually the penalty. Supu does involve *rongo* and *be*, but the popo may be excused. However, in more serious cases, such as *rughu* and bodily harm, the order of things is higher, and therefore a popo to signify the degree of wrong agreed upon is included in the exchange.

Such exchanges often take place at a venue agreed to by both families and mamata of both parties. The presentation of supu in such situations usually involves exchanges of food and valuables such as *rongo vatu*, following apologies and pleas for forgiveness. After the acceptance of apologies and remorse, solemn exchanges of wisdom, teachings and advice to young members of both parties on the meaning of the ceremony are made, and the agreement that seals the new relationship from that day onward is outlined. Made before the event, this agreement is a powerful reference point that slowly brings back peaceful coexistence and normalcy to the families concerned and the community more generally.

In essence, the danger, shame, humiliation, hardship, pain and guilt is indirectly shared by all members in the dispute. It is always a two-way process of exchange, unlike a fine, which is a one-way penalty. These exchanges are relational, and parties and individuals who are willing to engage must be easily identifiable. Without clearly identified individuals or parties, and in the absence of willingness to participate in the exchanges, it can be a waste of time, effort and resources. A classic example of such failure was the attempted reconciliation ceremony masterminded by the Solomon Islands Government (SIG), Guadalcanal and Malaitan provincial leaders at the beginning of civil unrest known as ‘the tensions’, in 1998 and 1999 (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Kabutaulaka, 2001, p. 16). The militants themselves, or the groups whom they purported to represent, were never part of the negotiations nor were they willing to reconcile. In such a situation, supu is artificial and bound to fail, as indeed was the case then. In such instances, where problems are not sorted out, *tu thaghata* (bad relationships) persist and could potentially trigger payback tendencies and further acts of humiliation, and in extreme cases, could lead to *sura* (raids or tribal war).

### **State use of popo and supu**

Indigenous diplomacy in the form of popo, supu and other local protocols has increasingly been called upon by the state for important events and

occasions. The spirit of popo and supu is potentially useful in modern Solomon Islands diplomacy, since these are indigenous protocols of maintaining relationships, creating new networks, mending broken relationship through compensation and reconciliation, or recognising important guests and anniversary dates. To demonstrate the use of popo and supu in the affairs of the state with internal and external parties, here are some examples. The specific events and ceremonies covered here are occasions where: visitors have been welcomed to the country; certain initiatives have been recognised, acknowledged and appreciated; achievements and the beginning of important national projects have been celebrated; pardon has been sought or remorse demonstrated for wrongs someone has committed; and reconciliations to restore normalcy have been required.

### **National welcome and official recognition ceremonies**

Popo and supu have also been used on many occasions to welcome prominent leaders, heads of regional governments, foreign delegations and royalty into the country. In November 2019, when then heir to the British royal throne (now King Charles) visited Solomon Islands, he was presented with a supu as part of his official program, as a statement of welcome and official recognition for his visit (Finley, 2019). Likewise, in July 2018, during the opening of the 6th Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival, the participants from Papua New Guinea (PNG), Fiji, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, East Timor, Australia and Taiwan were presented with supu, to welcome and accept them ('6th Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival', 2018; 'Colourful opening', 2018).

### **Appreciation and commencement of national development projects**

When development projects are about to commence, popo and supu are also used by the state to build trust and commitment from both the landowning mamata and the business involved. This is critical, as most

land in Solomon Islands is under customary tenure, and the support of landowning mamata is paramount. The use of popo and supu is often an attempt to build trust and pave a way for honesty between parties and the keeping of agreements till the completion of projects. A popo and supu exchange or offering from customary landowners is an outward sign of agreement for the project to go ahead. An example is when the Asian Development Bank funded a bridge over the Lathi (Mberande) River.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, such ceremonies have abused the practice, because the state has funded the cost of popo and supu. In this example, before construction commenced, the government provided funds to the mamata, owners of the customary land where the bridge was to be built, and the display and distribution of popo was undertaken at Matepono village with government officials, provincial government officials, China Harbour Engineering officials and Asian Development Bank representatives present.

Similarly, when the reconstruction of the Tina–Betivatu road was about to commence in April 2014, a supu ceremony was undertaken as part of the government’s strategy to acknowledge the people of the land (‘Traditional ceremony marks infrastructure work’, 2014). Another ceremony that used supu to formalise a written agreement was the plan to reopen the Gold Ridge mine in May 2018. Since there were many locals panning for gold in the area, the state decided to hold a supu ceremony to request them to leave the mining pits for the owners to reopen. A total of 25 supu were presented to the 16 tribes in the area to seal this arrangement (Salini, 2018). In the above examples, the state’s use of popo and supu was artificial, as the SIG funded these supu ceremonies as public relation exercises.

---

3 The name of the river is Lathi (Na tina i Lathi). A location towards the river mouth is called Baraande (Mberande), where a commercial plantation operated by Burns Philp was located (Bennett, 1987), now home to the Kautogha Land Purchase Corporative Society.

## Celebration of community initiatives

Popo and supu are also used by both the national and provincial governments to open and celebrate major community initiatives. For instance, in July 2017, the Guadalcanal provincial government came up with an initiative to promote the work of local weavers. The initiative brought together weavers from the 21 wards of the province to showcase their weaving skills and sell their finished products. The SIG funded a supu ceremony to show appreciation for the efforts of participants and guests ('Guadalcanal weaving festival this week', 2017). In August that same year, the SIG officially announced plans to declare the World War II battle site at Bloody Ridge a national park. The national government again used the indigenous process of giving a supu, this time to acknowledge the customary landowners around the national park ('Solomons to declare national park at WWII battle site', 2017). Most national projects – including the reopening of Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Limited, the Gold Ridge mine, the undersea cable landing station, and the Tina Hydro project signing – have had popo or supu ceremonies, as the government's approach to thank and seek landowners support for the projects. Where the state uses supu to acknowledge and thank resource owners and seek their cooperation, it is a proper use and therefore right according to local protocol.

## Apologies, admission of wrongdoing and seeking pardon

In recent years, popo and supu have also played a role in situations where national and regional apologies or acknowledgement of wrongdoing has taken place. As these ceremonies are based on respect shown through deeds (work), in the Lengo context, *kukuni* (respect) and *kikinima* (reverence) are central to the concept of *viloghoi* (interrelatedness) (Nanau, 2017). When these tenets are breached, such as through acts of theft or swearing, it may require the offending party or individual to admit their wrong and seek forgiveness from the victims. In such

situations, the offended party and the offenders are identifiable and known.

For instance, in April 2019, a female student from North East Guadalcanal studying in PNG posted offensive materials about Malaitans whom she blamed for the riot that year in Honiara. The offensive words were so bad that they brought disrepute to the whole constituency. It was a breach of *kikinima* and respect for others, especially the group of people about whom she had made generalisations. The MP for North East Guadalcanal then took it upon himself to apologise on behalf of his constituent following negotiations with his counterparts in parliament. Popo and supu were used when he apologised to the people of Malaita and other provinces and constituencies. In a similar fashion, the people of North Guadalcanal offered popo and supu to apologise to those who suffered at their hands and the hands of the government during the tensions, from 1998 to 2003 (Osifelo, 2016). For Lengo speakers and Guadalcanal society more generally, it is virtuous and a strength to recognise the wrongs one does and to make amends by seeking forgiveness. Once accepted, popo and supu is used to restore relationships. While national leaders used popo and supu correctly in these two instances, the downside was that it took away the responsibility from individuals who should have borne the brunt of their own disrespect and recklessness.

## **Compensation versus reconciliation**

The modern state and other bodies have also used this indigenous approach to reconcile parties to a conflict, especially where lives have been lost and properties destroyed. Many reconciliations to restore relationships after the tensions (from 1998 to 2003) used popo and supu. For instance, the government Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace brought together members of the Marasa community on the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal to reconcile using a supu ceremony. Comprising food, live pigs and shell money, the supu was to rebuild broken relationships. Seeking forgiveness, perpetrators

brought their supu to demonstrate their remorse, while victims presented theirs to show they accepted the apology (Brigg, et al., 2015; Fox, 2016). Although these are costly undertakings, their deeper meanings and positive outcomes overshadow costs and pain endured in the process.

Despite its objective to strengthen the state's Western-style justice and legal processes, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) also called on the indigenous protocol of supu to calm a situation involving its members. When responding to a community fight in August 2010, a RAMSI soldier shot and killed a local leader who was also there to try to defuse the situation (Allen et al., 2013, p. 40). Presenting the supu to the family of the deceased, RAMSI special coordinator Graeme Wilson stated:

As we mourn Harry Lolonga's passing, let us all pray and ask God's divine guidance in working together with all parties to resolve this tragic incident amicably ... For my part, I will be doing everything within my means to try to address this situation ... I assure you all of our sincere and heartfelt condolence on this sad occasion. ('RAMSI presents chupu to Titinge Village', 2010)

In reconciliation events, supu is used to seal forgiveness over a wrong and in order for that event to be given proper closure and not repeated in the future. Sometimes supu is also presented to calm situations down and allow for intense negotiations. In such situations, actual closure, in the form of supu and popo, would also take place later.

## Conclusion

Lengo diplomacy is premised on the two foundational creeds of *kukuni* (respect) and *kininima* (reverence) explained earlier. Observing these creeds – when interacting with others, their environment and the spirit world – ensures peaceful coexistence, empathy and harmony. The same

is expected of those interacting with Lengo speakers. These principles focus on maintaining friendly relations between different groups of people and entities. Popo and supu are outward manifestations of these values. As shown throughout this chapter, popo and supu protocols are being adopted into modern state diplomatic and development undertakings. They have been employed in trust-building exercises, welcome ceremonies, celebrations, reconciliations, compensation and other national undertakings.

When used rightly in appropriate settings with genuine understanding, these forms of Lengo diplomacy become useful and effective for the state. For example, their use to formally welcome and thank important visitors is a relational gesture. Moreover, there was proper use of the supu on the occasion where the state supported a landmark reconciliation between the Weathercoast people of Guadalcanal to restore relations and in RAMSI's presentation of supu to show remorse and seek forgiveness from the Titinge community, and it was therefore successful and respected. However, when used inappropriately, as in the height of the tensions, with parties involved not clearly identified and consulted, such practices fail. Likewise, where a state uses popo and supu as a public relations stunt, especially when paying people to present the popo and supu to their own people with unclear justifications, it becomes a mockery of the practice. Moreover, when the state forces the process without identifying who the perpetrators and victims are or whether there is agreement for such a popo and supu process to go ahead, it is bound to fail, as experienced with the reconciliation effort at the beginning of the ethnic tensions.

Popo and supu practices must be contextualised and understood by all parties involved to be effective and appreciated. It is essential to value the spirit of these indigenous practices before emulating them in modern state undertakings. To recap, in the Lengo indigenous context, popo and supu are used to encourage order and maintain relationships in a close-knit society with five kema and numerous mamata who trace their roots to two major tribes: *kema kiki* and *kema sule*. Their use by the

Lengo speakers strengthens revered and respectful relationships, even in situations where badly broken relationships have had to be mended through truth-telling, expression of remorse and reconciliation.

These same Indigenous diplomatic practices when emulated by the state are often hijacked by an emphasis on public relations stunts and compensation – and at times, obligating popo and supu ceremonies for inappropriate situations – rather than for relationship restoration and reconciliation. In modern state settings, relationships and encounters made through popo and supu may sometimes be problematic because of monetary implications associated and the potential abuse of such indigenous processes. The symbols of reciprocity and coexistence emulated in the popo and supu ceremonies are relevant Indigenous diplomatic practices that continue to have value in present day Lengo and Guadalcanal. The practices have withstood the test of time and globalisation, and they hold lessons for the practice of modern diplomacy in Solomon Islands.

## References

- 6th Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival hem open long Honiara [6th Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival open in Honiara]. (2018, July 2). ABC News: Tok Pisin. <https://www.abc.net.au/tok-pisin/2018-07-02/6th-melanesian-arts-and-culture-festival-hem-open-long-honiara/9931968>
- Allen, M., Dinnen, S., Evans, D., & Monson, R. (2013). *Justice delivered locally: Systems, challenges and innovations in Solomon Islands* [Research report]. World Bank.
- Bennett, J. A. (1987). *Wealth of the Solomon Islands: A history of a Pacific archipelago, 1800–1978*. University of Hawai'i Press.

- Braithwaite, J., Dinnen, S., Allen, M., Braithwaite, V., & Charlesworth, H. (2010). *Pillars and shadows: Statebuilding as peacebuilding in Solomon Islands*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/PS.11.2010>
- Brigg, M., Chadwick, W., Griggers, C., Mannie, S., Murdock, J., & Vienings, T. (2015). *Sycamore Tree Restorative Justice Programme, Solomon Islands*. UNDP Pacific Centre.
- Bugotu, F. (1968). The culture clash: A Melanesian's perspective. *New Guinea and Australia, the Pacific and South-East Asia*, 3(2), 65–70.
- Colourful opening. (2018, July 2). *Solomon Star*. <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/colourful-opening>
- Dörrbecker, M. (2019, June 20). [Administrative divisions of Guadalcanal] [Map]. Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_Administrative\\_Divisions\\_of\\_Guadalcanal\\_\(Solomon\\_Islands\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Administrative_Divisions_of_Guadalcanal_(Solomon_Islands).png)
- Finley, S. (2019). 'Queen blong yumi!' Prince Charles speaks Pidgin English and is presented with a hog-tied pig during the last day of his Solomon Islands tour. *Mail Online*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-7722411/Prince-Charles-welcomed-traditional-dancers-day-Solomon-Islands-tour.html>
- Fox, L. (2016, July 6). Reconciliation ceremony for Solomon Islands' police and ex-combatants from Guadalcanal. *Pacific Beat*. [Radio program]. ABC Radio Australia.
- Guadalcanal weaving festival this week. (2017, July 31). *Solomon Star*. <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/guadalcanal-weaving-festival-this-week>
- Kabutaulaka, T. T. (2001). *Beyond ethnicity: The political economy of the Guadalcanal crisis in Solomon Islands* (SSGM Working Paper 01/1). Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/5f1fffd0d1cc1>

- Nanau, G. L. (2017). 'Na Vanuangu': Epistemology and personahood in Tathimboko, Guadalcanal. In U. L. Va'ai & U. Nabobo-Baba (Eds.), *The relational self: Decolonising personhood in the Pacific* (pp. 177–201). USP Press and Pacific Theological College Press.
- Osifelo, E. (2016, July 6). North Guadalcanal says sorry. *Solomon Star*. <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/north-guadalcanal-says-sorry/>
- RAMSI presents chupu to Titinge Village. (2010, August 16). *Solomon Times*. <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/ramsi-presents-chupu-to-titinge-village/5456>
- Salini, C. (2018, May 28). Gold Ridge landowners sign agreement to move out of mine site. Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC). <https://www.sibconline.com.sb/gold-ridge-landowners-sign-agreement-to-move-out-of-mine-site>
- Solomons to declare national park at WWII battle site. (2017, August 2). *Radio New Zealand* (RNZ). <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/336342/solomons-to-declare-national-park-at-wwii-battle-site>
- Traditional ceremony marks infrastructure work. (2014, April 28). *Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation* (SIBC). <https://www.sibconline.com.sb/traditional-ceremony-marks-infrastructure-work>
- Tylenda, J. N. (1985). *A pilgrim's journey: The autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*. Liturgical Press.
- Unga, P. 2008. *Aspects of Lengo grammar* [Master's thesis, Trinity Western University]. Canada Institute of Linguistics. <https://www.canil.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2008-Unger-Paul.pdf>

## 8

# **Malaitan traditional diplomacy in national politics**

TONY HIRIASIA

In Solomon Islands, it is not uncommon for political disputes to be settled through the use of traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution practices. The use of traditional diplomacy and reconciliation practices is appealing for political spaces because of their focus on restoring relationships between concerned individuals or parties. Therefore, politicians tend to favour traditional diplomacy and reconciliation practices as means to resolve political disputes, hence maintain their numbers and hold parties or coalitions together.

This chapter discusses the use of traditional diplomacy by the Malaita Alliance for Rural Advancement (MARA) government led by premier Daniel Suidani in the period from 2019 to 2023. During this period, MARA resorted to traditional dialogue and diplomatic practices to rebuild political relationships and settle political disputes within the Malaita Provincial Government (MPG) and, specifically, the MARA coalition. The MARA coalition also used these same processes to bring

together the different language groups within Malaita in support of their political agenda. In so doing, the Suidani-led MARA achieved a level of political consciousness and unity never seen before among the Malaitan population. This has serious implications for both provincial and national politics.

The first section of this chapter discusses the use of traditional diplomatic processes in Malaitan cultures to establish new alliances/relationships, as well as to settle conflicts and disputes. The second section looks at the institutionalisation of Indigenous diplomatic processes into state processes and protocols. The third section covers the use of Indigenous diplomacy within the Malaita Provincial Assembly from 2019 to 2023.

## **Malaitan traditional diplomacy**

My use of the term Indigenous diplomacy in this chapter mainly aligns with what Stephen McGlinchey (2017, p. 20) says about diplomacy:

Diplomacy has probably existed for as long as civilization has. The easiest way to understand it is to start by seeing it as a system of structured communication between two or more parties ... it should be underlined that political communities, however they may have been organized, have usually found ways to communicate ... and have established a wide range of practices for doing so. The benefits are clear when you consider that diplomacy can promote exchanges that enhance trade, culture, wealth and knowledge.

From this point of view, Malaitans have relied for centuries on traditional diplomatic processes to build relationships or settle disputes between individuals, families, tribes, communities, ethnic groups and even external individuals and groups. Known by different names in the different language groups, these diplomatic processes are similar

in practice and, at minimum, involve interactions, dialogue and the exchange of goods and local currencies between parties concerned. Moreover, in disputes, intermediaries are likely to be involved and will be responsible for mediating between conflicting parties.

We find evidence of such diplomatic institutions and processes among the different language groups of Malaita. For instance, in writing about the Baegu people of Malaita, Ross (1978b) discusses the ‘institution of *kwaimani*’, a particular gift exchange practice that is aimed at building relationships that are useful to the giver:

One gives to gain an ally, a man who will aid his friend when needed. Other things being equal, a man who has many *kwaimani* friends is a powerful man. (Ross, 1978b, p. 14)

Through the institution of *kwaimani*, an individual creates a formal friendship or alliance by presenting gifts to a potential ally. Although such gifts will be reciprocated, the goal is not to outdo the other as in the case of ‘big-man’ gifting described by Sahlins (1963). Rather, it is a process through which helpful alliances are formed and individuals are able to expand their power base.

In talking about the people of Kwaio, Keesing also mentions alliances that are maintained through intermarriage and involvement in mortuary feasts:

Relations between groups were maintained by bonds of inter-marriage and alliance in mortuary feasting, and sundered periodically by ramifying blood feuds. (Keesing, 1987, p. 432)

Here, involvement in bride price payments and contributions to mortuary feasts, or other feasts for that matter, affirms and strengthens one’s links to others. Again, although gifts of all sorts will be reciprocated, reciprocity in this sense is a confirmation of existing links and relationships.

While the literature on Melanesian gifting focuses on gifting and reciprocity as a way to attain prestige and social status, gifting happens mainly within kin networks, which also includes those connected through intermarriage. These are spaces where interactions and exchanges serve to affirm and strengthen existing relationships and networks.

In 'Are'are in the southern part of Malaita, marriage within tribes is forbidden, hence marriages are intertribal. Bride price ceremonies are not one-sided either but an exchange of valuables (shell money) and food/goods between the groom's and the bride's parties. These exchanges formalise the new relationship established through marriage and the extension of one's network to other tribes. The new partnership and network (the bride or groom) is called *ahorota* in 'Are'are. In these contexts, marriages are not just the coming together of two individuals but also the evolution of new networks and partnerships.

Besides marriage and feasting, there are other spaces where individuals and tribes interact and relationships are established. One such space is the market. In writing about the role of 'bush markets' in the northern part of Malaita, Ross (1978a, p. 119) describes them as spaces for social and cultural integration. Likewise, he notes the importance of markets as places where trading partnerships and other agreements are reached between the bush (Baegu) and the coastal (Lau) peoples:

The criterion of successful trading is not profit but the establishment of permanent trading partnerships, which reduces competition, stresses social values, and helps maintain the peace. (Ross, 1978a, p. 134)

Here the focus is not so much on the profit one makes but on establishing economic relationships that prove beneficial in the long term. Ross also notes that, because of the long-term benefit accruing from market partnerships and relationships, individuals are motivated to behave amicably so as not to disrupt the space and trading activities:

Successful traders acquire formal trading partners through their marketing by offering consistent quality and reliable dealing...These are dyadic relationships between people who trade together recurrently, and who establish personal ties of mutual trust and obligation for the long-term benefit of both. Hence, people are motivated to behave in ways that enhance their prospects of attracting trading partners. (Ross, 1978a, p. 134)

Cooper also talks about the 'market' as an institution that provides a peaceful environment that enhances trade among the Langalanga, Kwara'ae and Kwaio people of Central Malaita:

The people traded with the neighboring Kwara'ae and Kwaio peoples for vegetable products. Peace-of-the-market arrangements and institutionalized trading partnerships persisted even in times of general hostility. (Cooper, 1971, p. 270)

Like Ross, Cooper (1971) alludes to the norms and arrangements that bind individuals together to allow social and economic interactions to go on without disruption.

Besides building partnerships, traditional diplomatic processes in Malaitan cultures also extend to conflict resolution. Cornago (2008) states that diplomacy is the attempt to remove conditions that alienate individuals or groups. For instance, Russell (1950, p. 6) states that, in the case of the Fataleka people, the office of the *mwane inoto* (secular chief of each clan) took on the responsibility of settling disputes and mediating between conflicting parties: 'A subsidiary function of the *nwane inoto* was the settling of petty disputes which arose within his clan or lineage'.

Similarly, in 'Are'are, certain diplomatic processes have become useful for managing inter-and intra-tribal relationships within communities. In particular, inter- and intra-tribal diplomacy in 'Are'are hinges on the two concepts of *paunimaecha* and *arahuna*, terms more comparable to the *talanoa* concept and practice of Fiji.

Both terms, *paunimaecha* and *arahuna*, refer to the same thing; the diplomatic dialogue and interactions between parties with the intention of finding a peaceful solution to an issue. Moreover, *paunimaecha* or *arahuna* can either lead to a resolution without cost, or one that may involve the exchange of money and goods. Therefore, inter- or intra-tribal conflict resolution in 'Are'are starts with *paunimaecha* and *arahuna*.

The diplomacy that relates to trade also extended beyond the Malaitan shores to nearby islands and, in some instances, as far as Bougainville. One such trade was the shell money trade of the Langalanga people. According to Cooper, the shell money trade not only extended beyond the Langalanga region of Malaita but also to the Florida Islands, Guadalcanal, San Cristobal and further north to Buin in southern Bougainville (Cooper, 1972, p. 273). The shell money (or *tafuli'ae*, as it is commonly known) was preferred for bride price payments. As Cooper explains, 'The Kwara'ae and peoples of north Malaita plus those of the Florida group and Guadalcanal preferred *tafuli'ae* for bride price' (Cooper, 1972, p. 273). More importantly, Malaitans and especially the Langalanga people had established trading partnerships with people from nearby islands and also beyond the Solomon Islands' northern border.

Throughout history, Malaitans have capitalised on traditional diplomatic processes and institutions to establish new relationships, rebuild broken ones and maintain peace and order among families, extended families and tribal groups. More recently, these traditional institutions and diplomatic practices have found their way into the modern state apparatus and institutions and have been used to settle disputes and resolve conflicts at both national and provincial levels.

## **Institutionalising traditional diplomatic practices in the modern state**

The usefulness and strengths of traditional diplomacy in providing mechanisms for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the contemporary context have been demonstrated across Melanesia. For instance, as Boege and Garasu (2011, p. 163) argue in the case of the Bougainville crisis, progress in peacebuilding was due mainly to the use of 'Indigenous customary institutions, methods, and instruments of conflict resolution and reconciliation'. The authors attribute this success to the fact that conflicting parties were strongly connected to local institutions (tribal groups), and recognised traditional peace negotiation processes. The recognition of local institutions and customary processes by the conflicting parties was important in giving legitimacy to local leaders in order to work between the conflicting groups to achieve more lasting peace. In fact, Boege and Garasu (2011, p. 163) state that the customary processes have now become part of the state-building effort in the post-crisis period.

Similarly, in writing about the role of traditional institutions and diplomacy in Vanuatu, Dinnen, Porter and Sage (2011, p. 4) agree that local institutions and traditional processes have complemented the modern state institutions and processes, especially in conflict resolution and settling disputes. The authors make direct reference to the *Malvatumauri* or the Council of Chiefs established under the Vanuatu Constitutions:

The *Malvatumauri*, for example, created by a provision of the country's Constitution, was tasked with 'protecting' and 'conserving' *kastom* and, although they have no formal powers in this regard, have played a significant role in resolving disputes in ways not possible through singular reliance on a Westminster style of government and justice. (Dinnen et al., 2011, p. 4)

The authors refer to the *Malvatumauri* as a hybrid arrangement where the institution complements state institutions and fulfils significant roles where the state is less effective. More importantly, the *Malvatumauri* demonstrates the effectiveness of traditional institutions as instruments of diplomacy and conflict resolution.

In talking about the peacebuilding processes in the post-conflict Solomon Islands, McDougall and Kere (2011, p. 143) also highlight the usefulness of traditional peacemaking practices and processes in the period of ethnic tensions after 2003. The authors reiterate the importance of traditional institutions (tribal units, traditional leaders, traditional processes etc.) in maintaining order and peace in rural Solomon Islands during the conflict years. At the end of the conflict in 2003, the communities and individuals who were affected by the conflict started reconciliation processes independent of government reconciliation programs (McDougall & Kere, 2011, p. 114). The local institutions and traditional leadership structures played a major role in brokering and facilitating these reconciliation processes.

Another important point highlighted by McDougall and Kere (2011, p. 144) was the fact that cultural differences did not hamper the post-conflict reconciliation processes in Solomon Islands. As opposed to the general assumption that cultural differences could potentially become an obstacle to peacebuilding processes, the authors state that Solomon Islanders proved that they were quite used to mediating cultural differences and were able to establish cross-cultural relationships where and whenever necessary. Again, this reaffirms the resilience of traditional institutions and Indigenous diplomatic practices and their usefulness as mechanisms for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

In recent times, government institutions and bodies have increasingly turned to traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution practices as means to solve conflicts in areas where the judicial system has limited reach. A case in point is the reconciliation ceremony between families

from Malaita and communities from Wanderer Bay on Guadalcanal. This particular reconciliation was related to the ethnic tensions that characterised the period 1998 to 2003 and the issues that took place during that period. The reconciliation between the two parties was brokered by the Ministry of Traditional Government, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs and the Guadalcanal Provincial Peace Office. It was also attended by then Malaitan premier Daniel Suidani (Solomon Islands Government, 2022). The ceremony involved the presentation of *chupu* (gift of food and money, elsewhere referred to as *supu* by the originators of this ceremony, the Lengo speakers of Guadalcanal) between concerned parties. A similar reconciliation ceremony was also brokered by the Correctional Service Solomon Islands in November of 2018 between inmates Harold Keke (former commander of the Guadalcanal Liberation Army) and his followers at the maximum prison facility in the Rove, West Honiara. The reconciliation was facilitated by other external stakeholders and religious groups.

There are two things worth highlighting about these cases. Firstly, government ministries and departments brokered these reconciliation events with members of the public, and they were facilitated through traditional institutions and processes. Government institutions had, in these cases, opted for the traditional peacemaking processes, knowing that conflicting parties recognise these traditional institutions and processes. Again, the recognition of the traditional diplomatic processes and practices by concerned parties was important to give legitimacy to local leaders to act.

Secondly, these reconciliation ceremonies were effective in restraining retaliatory actions. In fact, parties were bound to the understandings and agreements underlying the ceremonies and they were obliged to maintain their part of the agreements. This is where the state judicial system is often limited, because even when the state law deals with a perpetrator, those connected to a perpetrator are potential targets for retaliatory actions. The diplomatic process and ensuing reconciliation

therefore restrain potential violence from happening or getting out of hand, whereas the judicial system cannot do that.

## **Indigenous diplomacy, restorative justice and political conflict**

Perhaps, the resurgence of Indigenous diplomacy in modern politics (both at the national and provincial level) in Solomon Islands and elsewhere in Melanesia could be attributed to the relationship between restorative justice and traditional approaches to reconciliation and peacemaking processes. In practice, when Indigenous diplomatic processes are employed to mediate between conflicting parties, the aim is to restore relationships rather than pass judgements and penalties, as it would have been with the modern state judicial system. This approach to justice and peacebuilding has become popular in the post-conflict period especially on Bougainville and Solomon Islands.

This view of justice was reaffirmed in a study carried out by the Vanuatu-Australia Policing and Justice Support Program (Vanuatu) and the Australian Government (2016, p. 24) in Vanuatu. According to the study, locals tend to see the modern judicial system and traditional conflict resolution practices as opposing each other. The study shows that locals agree that the role of *kastom* (customary practice) and traditional institutions in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is to restore relationships. Thus, when using Indigenous diplomatic practices in conflict resolution in Melanesia, the aim is to restore relations and maintain peaceful coexistence among concerned individuals or groups of people.

The other extreme (which often bypasses diplomacy) would be 'payback' justice where crimes or wrongdoing are reciprocated. This does not need diplomacy and mediation and, in most cases, would likely spark a never-ending chain of crimes. Therefore, the aim of traditional diplomacy in conflict resolution is to restrain very volatile situations from spiralling out of control. This also means that when a perpetrator is dealt with by

the law, peace is maintained among relatives on both sides; those of the perpetrator and the victim.

When seen in the light of restorative justice, it is not surprising that traditional diplomacy and reconciliation practices are more appealing to those who want to resolve political conflicts. In a context where numbers count, it is always in the interest of conflicting parties to mend relationships rather than impose penalties that would further divide a political group. Therefore, traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution practices play well into the hands of politicians and have been favoured as means to resolve political disputes.

Moreover, in the case of Solomon Islands, reconciliation ceremonies often manifest in conflicting parties coming together and exchanging goods (mostly food) and money (traditional currencies) as well as fulfilling other traditional formalities. These ceremonies are often mediated by individuals or groups and provide the space where conflicting parties come together and reaffirm their commitment to a peaceful solution. In the case of political disputes, individuals or parties would reaffirm their commitment to a party or coalition.

### **Malaita Provincial Government, internal diplomacy and reconciliation ceremonies (2019 to 2023)**

In September 2019, Solomon Islands switched bilateral ties from Taiwan (Republic of China) to the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). The Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement (DCGA) led by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare announced the switch without proper public consultations, resulting in a public outcry over the decision. Perhaps the individual most outspoken against the switch was then Malaitan premier Daniel Suidani. With support of five Malaitan members of parliament (MPs) from the Parliamentary Opposition, MARA and Malaita Provincial Assembly members drafted the document known as the *Auki Communique* (Foukona, 2020. p, 600). *The Auki*

*Communique* takes a very strong stance against Chinese funding and projects on Malaita, which also led to the suspension of some major projects in the province. This also led to a stand-off between the Malaita Provincial Government and the DCGA, led by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare.

### **Internal diplomacy**

Despite initial overwhelming support for MARA and its position on China, over time the continuous pressure put on the Malaita Provincial Government by the DCGA to align with its policies created internal divisions within the coalition. By October of 2020, premier Suidani faced the first motion of no confidence in the Malaita Provincial Assembly. Although it was successfully and unanimously defeated, it started a series of attempts aimed at overthrowing the Suidani-led MARA government within the period from 2019 to 2023. More importantly, it also exposed the internal divisions that were often covered up through reconciliation practices.

Furthermore, the internal division also prompted the need for MARA to work tirelessly to maintain public support and hold the coalition together. Premier Suidani therefore embarked on a number of visits to different parts of the province with the hope of garnering support from the public. One such trip was taken to Afio Station in the southern part of Malaita in October of 2021. For this trip, he was also joined by the MPs from the southern part of Malaita. The trip was conducted in a traditional way, with a traditional welcome and other formalities performed by chiefs and elders of that region (Saeni, 2021a). A similar trip was also made to the northern part of Malaita in May of 2022 (Saeni, 2022). These trips were internal diplomatic missions aimed at portraying MARA as a coalition that wanted serious engagement with the Malaitan people.

### **Reconciliation ceremonies**

Alongside these internal diplomatic missions, MARA and its supporters also facilitated reconciliation ceremonies to restore relationships between the coalition and individual members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) who may have left due to disagreements. One such reconciliation was arranged between Daniel Suidani and Randol Sifoni, who was the former deputy premier but had left the coalition due to disagreements (Waikori, 2021b). Such small events usually involved exchanges of speeches followed by shell money exchanges, wrapping up with prayer.

There were also some major reconciliation ceremonies that had bigger implications. The first one was the one arranged by Malaita for Democracy (M4D), a group closely connected to the Malaitan premier at that time, Daniel Suidani. The traditional reconciliation ceremony involved the usual contribution of food and pigs by each ethnic group, followed by traditional formalities. As with most reconciliation ceremonies, this event also involved church representatives and prayer programs.

The reconciliation happened the week before the 2021 Honiara 2021 riots. The timing of this reconciliation ceremony prompted critics to accuse the Suidani-led MARA of instigating the Honiara riots. Only five Malaitan MPs who were in the Opposition attended the ceremony, although all Malaitan MPs were invited (Foukona, 2020, p. 600). In fact, the stand-off between MARA and the central government played well into the hands of the opposition, so the Malaitan opposition MPs often showed support for MARA whenever and wherever possible. In order to portray the reconciliation as inclusive, organisers invited leaders from 13 Malaitan major ethnic groups to attend the event on two days (18 and 19 November, 2021).

Moreover, the organiser of the reconciliation ceremony, M4D, was not part of the formal provincial government setup but operated as an independent group that had rallied support behind premier Suidani.

The same group was associated with other public protests and marches in Auki ('Protests in Auki, Malaita Province', 2019). Moreover, because of their role in the Aimela Reconciliation and the timing of the Honiara riots, M4D was also accused of planning the riot, and their leaders were arrested and questioned by the police in relation to it. On the other hand, because of the independence of M4D, the premier could easily distance himself from the group's activities, especially during the State of Emergency when all public protests were banned.

Beside the reconciliations done in favour of MARA, there were other reconciliation ceremonies that undermined the MARA grip on power within the period from 2019 to 2023. One such reconciliation ceremony was brokered between Prime Minister Sogavare and former Malaita Eagle Force commander Moses Su'u in 2021. This particular reconciliation ceremony was important in that it took place at a time when Malaitan dislike for Sogavare was at an all-time high. Moreover, Moses Su'u was a leader among one of the biggest ethnic groups on Malaita. The reconciliation was therefore seen as an attempt to influence Malaitan public opinion about Sogavare. The reconciliation sparked a public outcry among Malaitans, and critics were quick to say that Moses Su'u was given money to do it. However, that particular reconciliation is important in that it led the way for a gradual shift in public opinion that eventually allowed Prime Minister Sogavare to visit the northern part of Malaita in 2022 ("Welcome, you are one of us," 2022).

A final case of reconciliation that is also worth mentioning here is the reconciliation between member of parliament Rollen Seleso and the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening (MPGIS) and the people of Malaita on 15 August 2023. Under his watch as the minister of the MPIGIS, Seleso has taken a tough stance on the MARA coalition because of its non-alignment with some of the DCGA policies; in particular, the diplomatic switch from Taiwan to China. Therefore, having been invited as the guest of honour, Seleso

used the opportunity on the Malaita Province Second Appointed Day Celebrations (15 August) in Honiara to mend the relationship between the national government and Malaita Province. The timing was also right because, by then, Premier Suidani had been ousted through a motion of no confidence. For this reconciliation ceremony, Seleso presented a *chupu* (the common name given to the traditional gift exchanges on Guadalcanal) to the Malaita Province, which was reciprocated by the Speaker of the Malaita Provincial Assembly, Ronny Butala. More importantly, the ceremony marked a restored relationship between the national and provincial governments, and a move away from the policy stance of the MARA coalition.

## **Implications for national and provincial politics**

### **Obstruction of democratic processes**

Perhaps one of the problems brought about by solving political disputes via traditional diplomacy and reconciliation practices is that these processes are often used to obstruct democratic processes. One good example of this is the second motion of no confidence tabled to be moved against Premier Suidani on 27 October 2021 (Saeni, 2021b). The supporters of MARA rallied the public, and they marched to the accommodation where the non-executive members were staying. The mob then threatened the MPs and demanded that they withdraw the motion. A reconciliation and apology session was hastily arranged, and the mover announced the withdrawal of the motion.

Thus, while the use of reconciliation and diplomacy helped, in this particular case, to ease the tension, it also cancelled the opportunity for the mover to take the motion of no confidence to the floor of the Assembly. Indirectly, the reconciliation was used to obstruct the democratic processes available to members of the Provincial Assembly to express their lack of confidence in the premier.

Moreover, during that period, there was one aspect of Indigenous diplomatic practice that was also put to use to deny members of the Provincial Assembly from entering the meeting chamber. This incident involved putting women in front of the door to the Malaita Provincial Assembly chamber (Waikori 2021a). In the Malaitan culture, men are not allowed to step over women's legs or bodies when sitting or lying down. Pollard (Liloquilo & Pollard, 2000, p. 9) highlighted this particular *tambu* (taboo), specifically referencing the 'Are'are culture.

This practice is often used to intervene between conflicting parties. Although it was used here for the same purpose, it was also meant to deny MPAs access to the House and hence disallowed a democratic process from going ahead.

### **Fostering corruption**

The use of compensation and traditional reconciliation to settle political disputes can also lead to abuse and corruption. This is especially true in Solomon Islands modern politics, where political coalitions are often funded by big businesses. The use of compensation to siphon funds from individuals or groups is outside of the traditional purpose of restoring relationships and making peace.

The abuse of reconciliation and compensation as a way to get funds was obvious in a demand put forth to the Suidani-led MARA by the non-executive members of the Malaita Provincial Assembly. In March of 2022, the non-executive members asked the MARA to pay the group SB\$160,000 in compensation. The group said that the money was to compensate them for the abuse they experienced in October of 2021 when they had intended to move a motion of no confidence against premier Suidani.

Although the group claimed that they were making a compensation claim in line with Malaitan tradition, they were actually using their numbers to put pressure on the Suidani-led MARA to pay their claims.

The group had 13 members, which meant that the Executive did not have a two-thirds majority of the 33-member Assembly. They threatened to boycott the Provincial Assembly budget meeting at that time, knowing that the budget could not pass without them. Previous to that, the non-executive members who were part of the Public Accounts Committee had also withdrawn from the committee, thus making it difficult to get the required approval to access funds from the national government.

These cases demonstrate that traditional practices of diplomacy and conflict resolution can be abused and used to make unnecessary demands for money and other favours. In traditional settings, peace and restorative justice are always at the centre of any reconciliation. In political disputes, the goal is to maintain the numbers within a coalition and therefore the demand for individuals to join are often abused for individual gain.

### **Camouflaging internal division**

The use of traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution practices in political spaces also camouflages internal divisions that over time will surface. In a traditional reconciliation, the desire for peaceful coexistence influences the way individuals or groups honour a reconciliation. That said, political disputes often occur between individuals or parties with different ideologies and priorities. This means reconciliation ceremonies can provide a superficial cover for these differences in view and political ideology. Over time, these differences will show through and coalitions fall apart.

During the course of their reign, MARA had to facilitate some reconciliation events (especially with individuals) to maintain their numbers and hold the coalition together. However, the deep-seated differences meant that these reconciliation events only provided a superficial unity that would erode over time. For instance, in the lead-up to the October 2021 no confidence motion and related events, some members of the MARA coalition withdrew their support and joined the non-executive members ('Suidani speaks out', 2021). Some of these

members had disagreements over the strict stance on China and the dispute over certain projects that should have been implemented in the province. That led to the motion of no confidence that was disturbed by a public protest that almost turned violent. Although some members returned to the coalition after reconciling with the premier (Waikori, 2021b), that did not last long, as Suidani was defeated in another motion of no confidence in early 2023 ('Vocal critic of Solomon Islands govt ousted', 2023).

As is obvious in these cases, differences in political ideologies and beliefs cannot be erased through diplomacy and reconciliation. In political spaces where allegiance is often based on ideologies and political convictions, it is quite hard to perform a reconciliation ceremony and expect individuals to stand by it. The reconciliation ceremonies only provide superficial cover for the deep-seated differences that then show over time.

## Conclusion

Malaitan societies have long used Indigenous diplomatic practices to restore relationships or establish new ones. These practices have also become useful in mitigating disputes and conflicts within government setups as well as in their dealings with the public. In fact, traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution practices often work well to maintain peace among individuals and parties in situations that would otherwise have been violent. Likewise, traditional diplomacy works well to restrain retaliatory actions often associated with individual and tribal conflicts in Melanesia, where misdeeds are often reciprocated.

Traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution, with its inherent aspect of restorative justice, is often appealing to politicians for settling disputes in political spaces. In a context where numbers are important, it is often in the interest of parties and coalitions to restore relationships rather than amplify divisions through penalties. This is where traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution practices have become useful in political spaces.

However, the case of MARA, and the use of traditional diplomacy in the Malaita Provincial Assembly, also point to problems and limitations associated with the practices in modern political spaces. Reconciliations are often used intentionally to obstruct democratic processes such as motions of no confidence from progressing. Moreover, when uncontrolled, the reconciliations can also be abused and used for personal benefit. Thus, although traditional diplomacy and reconciliation may be effective in other spaces, it has limits within political spaces, providing only a superficial unity that covers deep-seated differences in beliefs and political convictions.

## References

- Boege, V., & Garasu, L. (2011). Bougainville: A source of inspiration for conflict resolution. In M. Brigg & R. Bleiker (Eds.), *Mediating across difference: Oceanic and Asian approaches to conflict resolution* (pp. 163–182). University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824860967-010>
- Cooper, M. (1971). Economic context of shell money production in Malaita. *Oceania*, 41(4), 266–276.
- Cornago, N. (2008). Diplomacy. In L. Kurtz (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of violence, peace & conflict* (Vol. 1, pp. 574–580). Elsevier.
- Dinnen, S., Porter, D., & Sage, C. (2011). *Conflict in Melanesia: Themes and lessons*. World Bank Development report [Background paper]. World Bank.
- Foukona, D. J. (2020). Political review: Solomon Islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 32(2), 595–605.
- Keesing, R. (1987). African models in the Malaita highlands. *Man*, 22, 431–452.

- Liloquilo, R., & Pollard, A. A. (2000). *Understanding conflict in Solomon Islands: A practical means to peacemaking* (SSGM Discussion Paper, 00/7), Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/5f200784a3c78>
- McDougall, D., & Kere, J. (2011). Christianity, custom, and law: Conflict and peacemaking in the postconflict Solomon Islands. In M. Brigg & R. Bleiker (Eds.), *Mediating across difference: Oceanic and Asian approaches to conflict resolution* (pp. 141–162). University of Hawai'i Press.
- McGlinchey, S. (2017). Diplomacy. In S. McGlinchey (Ed.), *International relations* (pp. 20–31). E-International Relations Publishing.
- Protests in Auki, Malaita Province. (2019, September 17). *Solomon Times*. <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/protests-in-auki-malaita-province/9349>
- Vocal critic of Solomon Islands govt ousted in motion of no confidence. (2023, February 8). *Radio New Zealand*. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/483816/vocal-critic-of-solomon-islands-govt-ousted-in-motion-of-no-confidence>
- Ross, H. M. (1978a). Baegu markets, areal integration, and economic efficiency in Malaita, Solomon Islands. *Ethnology*, 17(2), 119–138.
- Ross, H. M. (1978b). Leadership styles and strategies in Melanesia. In Oliver, D. (Ed.), *Rank and status in Polynesia and Melanesia: Essays in honour of Professor Douglas Oliver* (pp. 11–22). Société des Océanistes.
- Russell, T. (1950). The Fataleka of Malaita. *Oceania*, 21(1), 1–13.
- Saeni, W. (2021a, October 24). Suidani given chiefly welcome. *Solomon Star News*. <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/suidani-given-chiefly-welcome/>

Saeni, W. (2021b, October 27). MARA reigns. *Solomon Star News*. <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/mara-reigns>

Saeni, W. (2022, May 16). Premier Suidani visits Tobaita at Malu'u. *Solomon Star News*. <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/premier-suidani-visits-tobaita-people-at-maluu>

Sahlins, M. D. (1963). Poor man, rich man, big-man, chief: Political types in Melanesia and Polynesia. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5(3), 285–303.

Solomon Islands Government. (2022, August 31). Government praised both parties for reconciling. <https://solomons.gov.sb/government-praised-both-parties-for-reconciling>

Suidani speaks out on planned Motion of No Confidence. (2021, October 7). *Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC)*. <https://www.sibconline.com.sb/suidani-speaks-out-on-planned-motion-of-no-confidence>

Waikori, S. (2021a, October 28). Suidani reign. *The Island Sun*. <https://theislandsun.com.sb/suidani-reign>

Waikori, (2021b, December 2). MARA gov't's reunion begins. *The Island Sun*. <https://theislandsun.com.sb/mara-govts-reunion-begins>

'Welcome, you are one of us,' Malaita Provincial Govt told Prime Minister Sogavare. (2022, October 24). *Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC)*. <https://www.sibconline.com.sb/welcome-you-are-one-of-usmalaita-provincial-govt-told-prime-minister-sogavare>



# 9

## **Haus krai: national symbol for grief and outcry, and a Melanesian space for diplomacy**

THERESA MEKI

### **Introduction**

Haus krai – the space and place for sharing grief over a beloved deceased person – is pervasive throughout the ethnically diverse landscape of Papua New Guinea (PNG). This staple of PNG's traditional economy, culture and society has continued into the urban modern setting, albeit in a hybrid format. The activities performed in a haus krai, and their implications, carry literal and figurative weight that sustains connection to place (ethnic village), identity, kin and belonging. In the last decade, this mourning custom, and the term haus krai itself, have become national symbols for grief and outcry. During March 2021, upon the passing of PNG's first Prime Minister Michael Somare, a 10-day national haus krai was held at Port Moresby's Sir John Guise Indoor Complex. This event provided the opportunity for Port Moresby's general public, the

diplomatic community and other state dignitaries to attend, pay their final respects to the Somare family and participate in communal grief. Amid the presentations and orations delivered by national leaders, the haus krai atmosphere of collective sorrow also offered an opportunity for relationships to be reinforced, and alliances to be built. Drawing on this and three other high-profile haus krai occasions, this chapter conceptualises the Melanesian haus krai phenomenon as a potential site for Indigenous diplomacy in that it fosters the ideal atmosphere to restore and strengthen relationships, allowing for freedom of speech – however assertive or even critical – and fostering an atmosphere for building consensus.

## **Contemporary haus krai**

A haus krai is a temporary shelter usually built quickly, located within the residential boundaries or yard of a bereaved family. Upon the death of a loved one, relatives erect a makeshift structure to accommodate neighbours, friends and relatives who come to visit the grieving family. Haus krai also refers to the period from when the deceased resides in the funeral home until the burial day. This period can last from a few weeks to a month or more. The duration of the haus krai typically depends on whether the family of the deceased have collected ample funds to cover the costs associated with the funeral and burial of their dead. In the contemporary context, the practice of haus krai ‘refers to the attendance to the social and cultural obligation of burying loved ones’ (Rooney, 2021). During the pre-colonial era, mourning ceremonies and feasting were an essential component of the traditional economy. Aside from the traditional and cosmological implications of mourning ceremonies, the contemporary haus krai meeting and gathering serves an important function as decisions are made there in relation to funeral arrangements and the body’s repatriation for burial (Rooney, 2021). During the haus krai, the family of the deceased will organise the funeral program. If the deceased is to be buried in the village, they will organise logistics as well as other local traditional and customary burial obligations that pertain

to the deceased and their kin. Contributions, brought to the haus krai, whether in cash or kind, greatly help the bereaved family with the cost of logistics. After the burial, a feast or *kaikai* (food) will be organised to coincide with the removal of the temporary haus krai structure. At this occasion, food will also be distributed and given to friends and relatives who contributed earlier to the haus krai. This is also the opportunity for the bereaved to thank relatives, friends and neighbours for their support during the haus krai period. The feast and removal of the haus krai structure symbolises and marks the end of the sorrowful period, prompting a return to normal life.

In PNG's ethnically diverse society, the nuances of haus krai activities and death rituals vary according to locality. For example, some mourners arrive at the haus krai wailing, others come wearing all black, with mud painted on their faces, or pulling their beards and hair, while others come with mournful singing and chanting. It is a time for the community to 'bring' their sorrow – their attendance and expression of sorrow – in whatever way is the testament of their relationship to the deceased, that is, how important the deceased was to them. Their attendance tells the bereaved that they are not alone in their grief and that others are sharing their pain.

Other than outward displays of sorrow, haus krai attendees come with contributions to the bereaved family. These contributions can be bananas, taros, yams, sweet potatoes, pigs, coffee, tea, sugar, sugarcane, biscuits, bread, money and so on. Depending on the perishability of these contributions, the bereaved family will prioritise their use. For example, the tea, coffee and biscuits will be used for hosting haus krai visitors, while items such as taro and bananas are kept for the final feast when the haus krai is removed, as with livestock such as pigs or goats. Cash contributions are usually used to budget for funeral expenses, tomb construction, funeral home payments, the logistics of transporting body from funeral home to gravesite, and the haus krai removal feast. It is common practice for family members of the bereaved to keep a list

of the people who brought contributions as their contributions will be reciprocated accordingly when food is distributed during the haus krai removal feast. Those unable to contribute materially will pay their respects in service by daily residing at the haus krai, splitting firewood, keeping the kettle going, preparing food and cleaning. Their continual company, hosting and physical presence at the haus krai provides an invaluable level of comfort and aid to the bereaved. Apart from sharing grief on a personal level, showing up at a haus krai is a communal and cultural obligation, reflecting a connection to the deceased or to relatives of the deceased. It also functions as an act of reciprocity that sustains the traditional economy, as well reinforcing relationships, thus maintaining the social and cultural fabric of the community.

Moreover, in PNG as well as in other Melanesian societies, there is an integrated worldview in which physical and spiritual realities coincide (Humble, 2013). Hence physical activities such as haus krai and other pre-burial practices provide the impetus for spiritual and cosmological processes, as well as having concrete social implications. For example, in my mother's traditional Kafe<sup>1</sup> society, not attending a haus krai may raise suspicions that those absent were responsible for the death. Given the relatively small community, where members of the village usually gather for other feasts or ceremonies, opting to not attend a haus krai is socially questionable and can be highly suspect, particularly in societies where belief in sorcery is widespread.

In many Melanesian societies (Clay, 1986; Forsyth, 2006; Forsyth & Eves, 2015) including among the Kafe people, sorcery provides the explanatory framework for death, illness and misfortune (natural disasters, crop failure, animal attack and so on). In Kafe society, if homicide is suspected, the haus krai presents a unique opportunity for the bereaved to investigate who the potential killer might be. During the haus krai, mourners usually come in groups, singing and crying. Relatives

---

1 Kafe is a language group of people situated in the Eastern Highlands of PNG.

of the deceased are vigilant – watchful over which mourners are entering the haus krai crying, as well as looking at the body of the deceased in the casket usually on display for mourners to see and cry over. If at any point, a tear trickles down cheek of the deceased or their nose starts to bleed (fluids can seep from the eyes and nose after death), watchful relatives will immediately check to see which mourners recently entered haus krai and or are standing near the coffin. It is believed that tears or nosebleeds are a message from the deceased indicating that the one responsible for their death, also known as the poison-man, is nearby. These suspects are later sought out and interrogated to investigate if they had anything to do with the death. It is unlikely for suspects to admit their involvement in someone's death. In most cases, if the suspects are caught, they are tortured and eventually killed. This is just one example of the various types of conversations, contentions and activities that can occur in a haus krai. In addition, essential to burial is land, therefore discussions about land, kin connections, and customs also occur within the haus krai. Within the haus krai, grievances can be aired, and chastisement and rebukes can be made in the spirit of strengthening and bettering the community.

In this chapter, I first examine the haus krai events that occurred upon the deaths of two prominent Papua New Guineans, namely, Nahau Rooney and Michael Somare. These examples are given to outline the common procedure of events that occur during a contemporary haus krai. Specifically, the event at Rooney's Port Moresby haus krai illustrates the speaking opportunities that a haus krai facilitates. Somare's 2021 national haus krai illustrates the airing of grievances. While these two individuals are relatively elite compared to the average Papua New Guinean, the haus krai activity and procedure in both cases is generally like how other Papua New Guineans would conduct a haus krai.

Next, I discuss the national haus krai movement as a symbol of outcry. The vigil for and public funeral of the late Jenelyn Kennedy – a 19-year-old mother brutally murdered by her partner – is discussed to highlight the haus krai atmosphere of collective sorrow and public chastisement.

What this brings to the chapter is the application of the haus krai experience in a national hybrid fashion that maintains the elements of a traditional haus krai while operating in a contemporary setting. It is at this juncture that the haus krai becomes a symbol for national outcry and protest over defining societal issues. This chapter concludes by conceptualising certain elements of PNG's haus krai phenomenon as tools for Indigenous diplomacy, as it provides an atmosphere of neutrality and consensus. These elements include (a) attendance, (b) reinforcement and strengthening of relationships, and (c) the airing of grievances and burying the hatchet.

### **Nahau Rooney's haus krai**

Nahau Rooney, born Nahau Elizabeth Kambuou on the 18 April 1945, lived a remarkable life in PNG's history. Her story as a young girl from Lahan village Manus who became one of the pioneer women members of parliament in 1977 is prominent in PNG political history. Nahau was educated in PNG, Fiji and Australia, and married Australian Wes Rooney. In the 1977 national elections, she ran against nine male candidates and won. She was the first woman to serve in the Cabinet, first as minister for correctional services and liquor licensing in 1977, then in 1978 she became the minister for justice. She was re-elected in 1982 and was the only woman in parliament for that term (1982 to 1987). She also served as minister for civil aviation, and in 1985, she co-founded the People's Democratic Movement with Pias Wingti. Rooney lost her seat in the 1987 election but continued to serve PNG in high capacities such as in board memberships with the Air Nuigini board of directors, the Accident Investigation Commission, the council of the University of Papua New Guinea, the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission and the National Economic and Fiscal Commission. She also served as president of the National Council of Women. After her unsuccessful run in the 1997 national election, she continued her activism while managing the family's small business in Manus. In 2004, she unsuccessfully bid

for the position of Governor General ('13 candidates in latest PNG governor general's race', 2004).

Rooney passed away at her Korobosea home in Port Moresby on the eve of PNG's 45th anniversary of independence, 15 September 2020. Her passing came at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic with strict security measures in place (Rooney, 2021), nevertheless, her death occasioned all the respect and adulation expected of a pioneer political leader. Upon her passing, her home became the site of her Port Moresby haus krai where relatives, friends and colleagues visited the family and paid their final respects to Rooney, also known as Mama Nahau.

Rooney's haus krai in Port Moresby brought many high-level public servants, such as PNG Prime Minister James Marape, Dorothy Tekwie, Maria Hayes and a contingent of women leaders from the PNG Women in Politics (WiP) association. Tekwie was previously the leader of the PNG Greens Party and President of the West Sepik Provincial Council of Women. She founded the PNG WiP association and regarded Nahau as a mentor and strong PNG woman leader. Hayes was a former president of the PNG WiP – a long-time advocate for women's representation. During his speech at the haus krai, Marape spoke highly about Nahau's pioneering contribution at a time (the 1970s and 1980s) when many PNG women were not yet politically active. He spoke of Nahau's trailblazing achievements not only as a member of parliament but also as a pioneer leader of the nation (N'drop in Oceania, 2022).

Given the occasion was that of paying final respects to a pioneer woman politician and at that time (between 2017 and 2022) the PNG Parliament had no women representatives, Dorothy Tekwie responded to Marape's speech in part by requesting that his government and the political party Pangu foster women candidates by actively seeking out good women leaders and supporting them during their political campaigns. She completed her response by crawling on her knees towards the Prime Minister. In her Sepik culture a woman crawling towards a chief is a sign

of respect, and the chiefs in return were reminded of their obligation to provide for and protect women and their children. As Tekwie explained,

this can be translated into the bigger picture of the nation of PNG. The leaders we elect to Parliament are chiefs and they need to look after the women and children of the nation, who are members of their big clan – the country. I accorded the Prime Minister respect, while at the same time I am reminding him of his responsibility to the women and children of the nation PNG. (Tekwie & Rooney, 2021)

This exchange between Tekwie and Prime Minister James Marape exemplifies a type of conversation or ‘airing of grievances’ that is well accepted in the space and atmosphere of a haus krai. During the 2017 to 2022 parliamentary term, PNG had no women members of parliament. In fact, between Nahau’s first entry into the PNG parliament until the time of her passing in 2020, only ten women had been given mandate (Baker, 2019). Over the years, there have been various legislative provisions and attempts to increase the number of women in parliament (Sepoe, 2021). The largest campaign occurred in 2011, with the introduction of the Equality and Participation Bill, which proposed to have 22 reserve seats for women. Unfortunately, that bill did not receive enough support in parliament and was never passed (see Baker, 2019, for a detailed analysis of the bill’s failure). For women such as Dorothy Tekwie, who have been contesting seats regularly as well as advocating for more women in politics, it has been a long, arduous and frustrating journey. It would have been next to impossible for Tekwie to secure an audience with Marape, let alone express her concerns in such a clear and forthright manner. But Rooney’s ’s haus krai presented the ideal opportunity to do so. Even in death, her identity and legacy provided the platform to bring attention to the issue of women’s national representation. Moreover, the haus krai

setting provided an amicable atmosphere for Tekwie to have that candid exchange with Prime Minister James Marape.

After her funeral at the Sione Kami Memorial Church in Port Moresby on 8 October 2020, the late Nahau Rooney made her final trip home to Manus; her casket was received by an official procession composed of the Manus Provincial Government and community. Her casket made visits to locations considered significant to her career, such as the Provincial Pihi Manus Association (Provincial Council of Women) office, an establishment that she founded and built. The next stop was the Manus Provincial Assembly, where her casket lay in state in the company of the members of the Provincial Assembly. This occasion was presided over by Charlie Benjamin, the Governor for Manus, and Job Pomat, the open electorate Member for Manus. As a servant of the state, Nahau's final journey home was marked by these stops so that she could be officially mourned, and her career as a stateswoman celebrated and farewelled. Finally, on 11 October 2020, her casket was returned to her family at Lorengau Kohai Lodge (Rooney, 2021). This was her final stop before her burial and it provided an opportunity for her immediate family to pay their final respects.

Most members of parliament will get this special treatment upon their passing; the more esteemed or accomplished the person is, the more elaborate their haus krai and funeral procession. When PNG's first Prime Minister, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, passed away, the weight of his loss was felt by the entire nation. Somare had a week-long national haus krai that was televised on local channels and streamed live on YouTube. This enabled Papua New Guineans in the diaspora to share in the process by commenting in the live chat, or in the comments section if they missed the live stream. In the following section, this chapter analyses snippets of orations and presentations delivered during Somare's week-long haus krai. Somare's long life and legacy are too complex to unpack in detail in this chapter, but the analysis begins with a brief account of his life prior to a discussion of his haus krai.

## Michael Somare's haus krai

Michael Somare was born in the village of Rabaul on 9 April 1963 to Painari and her husband, a police officer Ludwig Somare Sana. The first six years of his life was spent in Rabaul, where his father was posted. His education started in a Japanese school in Kauru during World War II. After the Japanese left PNG, he spent much of his childhood in the village before enrolling in Boram Primary School. He completed high school in Finschafen and then completed Teachers' College in the town of Sogeri. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Somare worked as a teacher and as an interpreter for the Legislative Council and the first House of Assembly. He later attended Port Moresby's Administrative College where he met a group of students comprising Albert Maori Kiki, Tony Voutas, Pita Lus, Barry Holloway, Paul Lapun, Cecil Abel and Oala-Oala Rurua. This group of men formed the Bully Beef Club in 1967, which would become PNG's first locally initiated political party, Pangu Pati (May, 2021). Somare was first elected to the House of Assembly in 1968, and again in 1972. He became the Chief Minister when the country attained self-government in 1972. As the leader of Pangu Pati, Somare was pivotal in unifying the country towards independence in 1975. He was the country's first Prime Minister and was involved in PNG politics in various capacities and political positions throughout his life. Known affectionately as the 'father of the nation', his passing on 26 February 2021 brought the nation into collective mourning, reflection and unity.

In the lead up to Somare's state funeral – which was scheduled for 12 March 2021 – National Capital District (NCD) Governor Powes Parkop and Prime Minister James Marape organised a national 10-day haus krai from 1 to 10 March (Lepani, 2021), held at the Sir John Guise Indoor Sports Complex in Port Moresby. The venue was beautifully set up as a spacious auditorium with ample seating for guests, a stage and a front area for wreaths to be laid. As did Nahau Rooney's passing, Somare's passing and all events surrounding it, including the haus krai, occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. While public health at that time was

a high priority, and the gathering of large groups of people created an enabling environment for the spread of COVID-19, the option of not having a haus krai was not even entertained. As academic Nayahamui Michelle Rooney wrote, 'It would have been impossible for officials to restrict Somare's haus krai; such was his importance in PNG's political, historical, social, and cultural fabric.' (Rooney, 2021, p. 4).

Each night during Somare's haus krai, contingents from at least two provinces, led by their parliamentary representatives or member of parliament, came forward to present a performative item, present gifts and condolence messages, and lay wreaths for the Somare family. The event included traditional dance performances and songs. In the audience, were not only everyday Papua New Guineans but ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps, company directors, and other prominent people based in Port Moresby. The haus krai was an opportunity for them to pay their final respects to Somare and pass condolences to the Somare family as many of the attendants would not be able to escort Somare's casket to Sepik for his final burial. Even outside the Sir John Guise Stadium, crowds of people unable to get into the venue due to limited capacity sat outside, clad in black, with mud on their faces, many elderly women crying. Never in the history of PNG has there been such a unified display of grief. In other provinces, in little villages, people covered themselves in mud and sat in their own haus krai for Somare, the father of the nation. Across the Pacific, a condolence message was read from the Parliament of Australia. In solidarity with PNG, Vanuatu's Deputy Prime Minister Ismael Kalsakau officially announced a week-long haus krai, held from March 6 to March 12. Held at a designated location at the Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat (MSG). The MSG is a sub-regional intergovernmental group in the Pacific Islands consisting of Melanesian states. MSG members include Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and the Kanak and Socialist Liberation Front of New Caledonia. The organisation is headquartered in Port Vila, Vanuatu where the public were encouraged to come lay wreaths and sign the condolence book (PNG Today, 2021).

I watched portions of Somare's haus krai program on YouTube and was very impressed with how well the program was organised. The master of ceremonies, Cullighan Tunda, officiated in English, but each speaker presented in both their local dialect, Tok Pisin, and English for the expatriate community. Speakers generally commenced their speeches by highlighting their connection to Somare, sharing special memories or stories of the deceased, be they personal, professional or political; other orations focused on his personality and admirable traits, as well as expressing condolences to the Somare family.

During such orations, encouragement, exhortation and even chastisement are shared. Below is an example of a type of admonishment. The day of 6 March 2021 was scheduled for the representatives of Simbu and Eastern Highlands Province to 'bring their sorrow' and condolences to the Somare family. Led by Simbu Governor Michael Dua and Sinasina-Yongonmugl member Kerenga Kua, the Simbu contingent and all Simbu MPs were dressed in black slacks and t-shirts. Kua approached the stage area to recite his lamentation in the Kuman language, and while doing so he paced back and forth with a spear in his hand – a symbol of leadership in his society. A significant event Kua mentioned during this speech was Somare's controversial removal from the Prime Minister's seat in 2011. That year, Somare was sick and hospitalised in Singapore. In his absence, Peter O'Neill, the former Minister for Finance (later downgraded to Minister for Works) and his cohort of MPs 'successfully moved in parliament that the Prime Minister seat was vacant and elected O'Neill as Prime Minister' (May, 2021, p. 2). Even though the Supreme court ruled twice against their action, O'Neill maintained his position as Prime Minister with the support of his cohort until the 2012 national election, where he was re-elected and then legitimately elected as Prime Minister. The whole debacle was dubbed a constitutional crisis and left a bad aftertaste for Papua New Guineans. At the time, Kua, acting in his capacity as Somare's lawyer, emphasised the disrespect and audacity of those actions. Now at Somare's haus krai and choosing his words

carefully without naming names and pointing fingers, Kua demanded an apology to the Somare family for that injustice. Responses from the online and in-person audience overwhelmingly agreed with Kua's demand for an apology. To the culturally uninformed observer, Kua's tone and demand might have sounded out of place given the sombre occasion, but it was appropriate rhetoric in this context. The haus krai occasion and atmosphere presents an opportunity for such grievances to be aired; before the body of the deceased is laid to rest, it is considered beneficial for such contentions to be voiced and settled.

An important feature of the haus krai is attendance. A haus krai brings people together, people who are connected by the deceased, who otherwise might not have any reason to cross paths. This creates opportunities for exchange, such as in the example with Dorothy Tekwie and Prime Minister James Marape, whose important conversation was brought about by the occasion of Nahau Rooney's haus krai. As PNG society is reciprocal in nature, not attending a haus krai is a missed opportunity to invest in the traditional economy. As a meeting site, important conversations and revelations can occur there. Moreover, simply being in attendance contributes to social and cultural capital within a community and society. In recent years, the haus krai term, concept and phenomenon have been applied in contemporary settings to embody collective mourning and a call to action. The next section illustrates this modern application of haus krai.

## **Contemporising the haus krai**

The haus krai movement started in May 2013. This movement, which emerged to condemn violence, was prompted by the brutal public murder of Leniata Kepari. Twenty-year-old Kepari, accused of sorcery, was publicly tortured and killed in Mount Hagen on 6 February 2013 (Fox, 2013). Images of her horrific death, circulated on social media and reported in the national newspapers, sparked a national and international outcry (Chandler, 2013). The haus krai movement, also known as the

national haus krai, consisted of protest marches for ending violence against women during the day and vigils at night. Taking a variety of forms, the phenomenon has been observed in towns across PNG and in PNG diaspora communities in their local PNG embassies (Nalu, 2013). Using the haus krai term and symbol of mourning to label these events was appropriate as it reflected the level of anguish felt by the community. It was their collective cry against the atrocities of violence against women. Not only did these events commemorate Leniata Kepar, but they also highlighted and challenged the continual violence against and maltreatment of women and girls in PNG.

Another major crime that brought national grief was the brutal murder of 19-year-old Jenelyn Kennedy in 2020. Kennedy's brutal murder by her partner Boship Kaiwi made headlines from social media after Dr Sam Yockopua, the Chief Emergency Physician, examined her body and posted an angry, heartfelt message condemning domestic violence on his Facebook page. As Yockopua said:

it looked apparent that she had been through a living hell, a slow deliberate painful death... whip marks, skin cuts, bruises, scratches – you name it ... the black eyes on both sides and blood collection suggested a basal skull fracture. (Kuku, 2020a)

Yockopua did not routinely publicise cases brought before him but felt that the cruelty demonstrated in this death demanded public outrage and should be a wake-up call for PNG society and relevant authorities. His post went viral and soon the public in Port Moresby and other town centres were demanding justice for the late Jenelyn Kennedy. Dr Seth Fose, the Chief Pathologist at the Port Moresby General Hospital, confirmed that Jenelyn died from a 'head injury and bruised internal organs' (Kuku, 2020c). The police charged Bosip Kaiwi with wilful murder, and it was revealed that Kennedy had endured five years of

torture, with accounts emerging of her fleeing from her abusive partner and seeking shelter at a safe house. Her family had attempted to separate her from her partner Boship but had not succeeded, with the police failing to provide sufficient assistance (Kuku, 2020b). Kennedy's violent death once again brought national and international attention to PNG's domestic violence epidemic (Bablis, 2020; David, 2020). Around the country, citizens took part in the 'Shine the light' movement – a rally to decry a society that stands in silence while women suffer at the violent hands of their intimate partners (David, 2020). The PNG media followed the case intently on social media; especially on Facebook, as messages poured in with the 'Justice for Jenelyn' hashtag. Also on Facebook, a page called 'Road to Justice for Jenelyn' was created to post news in relation to Boship's legal case as well as previous cases of domestic violence-related deaths. On 2 July 2020, the Shine the light movement hosted a vigil for Kennedy, and eight days later her funeral was conducted at the Reverend Sioni Kami Memorial Church. Both events were televised and livestreamed on EMTV and PNG Loop's YouTube channel. The vigil brought together a broad spectrum of mourners and spectators, including Prime Minister James Marape and other members of parliament, as well as many spokespersons from non-governmental organisations. At both events, attorney and writer Ganjiki Wayne gave a stirring speech that both challenged and chastised the people in attendance (TVWAN Online, 2020).

Wayne spoke candidly about the country's domestic violence problem and the tragedy of Kennedy's death. Below are extracts from his speech.

The story of Jenelyn convicts all of us. It convicts and indicts all of us, the entire village. I have not done enough for Jenelyn. As a village we have failed. And as a village we must now rise up to fix ourselves.

From the ashes the village is waking up, it is realising its faults and it wants to fix it. The village wants to make sure that Jenelyn's story is not ever repeated again. The village must work hard to set all the Jenelyns free from all the torment of toxic relationships or abuse or rape or sexual harassment and the threat of murder.

The village of Papua New Guinea is deeply offended by this crime and the village is hurt and the village must find closure. (TVWAN Online, 2020)

Using the analogy of the village, enabled Wayne to achieve two objectives with his speech. First, the term 'village' functioned as a unifier, as PNG is still very much a traditional society and the term can be contextually understood and experienced on a deeper level. Second, it helped to personalise the situation thereby giving responsibility to each person in the audience. In these ways, Wayne expressed collective blame and responsibility for Jenelyn's tragic death, highlighting that in the months and years leading up to her death Kennedy did seek help. As he noted, Kennedy had made several visits to a police station reporting her case, but her case was not properly followed up. Moreover, her in-laws, residing at the same property as the couple were very much aware of the violence she endured, but did not intervene. The neighbours, who would have certainly heard her cries of pain, did not report the matter to the police. Hence Wayne's acknowledgement that PNG as a society, with its institutions and apparent collective indifference to domestic violence, failed Kennedy. Her tragic and painful death revealed a more vicious pandemic than COVID-19, an issue tearing away the very fabric of PNG society – the silence surrounding domestic violence (David, 2020). The delivery and tone of Wayne's speech, coupled with the haus krai atmosphere of the occasion, produced a stern effect. He appealed to the men to stop the violence if they are abusive to their partners,

to seek counsel and get help. Outside of the haus krai atmosphere and captive grieving audience, his chastising might not have been considered culturally and socially legitimate nor carried much weight.

## Conclusion

In contemporary haus krai-like events, such as Jenelyn Kennedy's vigil, the haus krai atmosphere facilitates 'tough' conversations. As with Kerenga Kua's demand for an apology at Michael Somare's haus krai, there are certain types of conversations that, out of respect and politeness, would not occur in everyday situations. The haus krai environment enables these discussions because the gathering is essentially an encounter with death – the atmosphere is shrouded in humility and deep reflection, thus making it easier for people to receive and process critical comment and chastisement.

This chapter began by analysing two contemporary haus krai events, those of Michael Somare and Nahau Rooney, to highlight the normalcy of haus krai in the contemporary setting and illustrate the types of conversations that occur therein. Moving onto the haus krai movement and vigils demonstrated the continuity of certain characteristics of haus krai, which can also be realised in a diplomatic or international space. First is the act of showing up. Attending a haus krai to pay respects is culturally appropriate behaviour. Attendance speaks volumes about the relationship and the impact that the deceased had on the life of those in attendance. Avoiding or not attending a haus krai has very different implications. Second, attending a haus krai provides the opportunity to strengthen relationships. As mentioned in Somare's case, those who attended and spoke at his haus krai began by sharing stories of their relationships with and connections to Somare. Retelling those stories reinforces and affirms these relationships. Finally, it can be an opportunity to bury the hatchet by voicing contentions, having confrontations with the purpose of fostering reconciliation and starting again with a clean slate.

So, what does haus krai as a site for building consensus and strengthening community contribute to the discussion on Oceanic or Indigenous diplomacy? Ultimately, notwithstanding its sombre association with death, the haus krai is a Melanesian space for diplomacy. Specifically, when we borrow Carter et al.'s definition of diplomacy which 'is a culture of engagement, a set of cultural rules and norms that shape interactions between political communities' (Carter et al., 2021, p. 2). At the haus krai, different families, communities, tribes and clans connected by kin and/or friendship come together and for a specific period, engaging within a set of cultural rules and norms in a way that has implications for future relations.

Moreover, what this chapter has also attempted to illustrate with the haus krai phenomenon in PNG is that societies in Melanesia, and the Pacific more broadly, are hybrid societies. As colonised people, we operate fluidly between two systems and ways of doing – our indigenous traditional culture and introduced Western institutions. As noted by Carter et al. (2021, p. 1), 'while westernization has added new layers of political community and diplomatic practice, it has not eliminated or even marginalised, traditional diplomatic systems and their protocols of engagement'. Rather, given the continuing strength of our traditional ways, it would be more appropriate and culturally significant to incorporate more of our traditional protocols into the contemporary national political landscape. Once that hybridity is normalised, it can be utilised as a unique diplomatic tool in PNG's relationships with other regional and international communities.

## References

- 13 candidates in latest PNG governor general's race. (2004, April 28). *Radio New Zealand*. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/148344/13-candidates-in-latest-png-governor-general's-race>

- Bablis, G. (2020, October 26). Turangu morie [Sad girl]. *Ples Singing – A PNG Writer’s Blog*. <https://plessingsings.com/2020/10/25/turangu-morie>
- Carter, S. G., Fry, G., & Nanau, G. (2021). *Oceanic diplomacy: An introduction* (DPA In Brief, 2021/23). Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/T84Y-DG87>
- Chandler, J. (2013, February 15). It’s 2013 and they’re burning ‘witches’. *The Global Mail*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150318071214/http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/its-2013-and-theyre-burning-witches/558/index.html>
- Clay, B. J. (1986). *Mandak realities: Person and power in central New Ireland*. Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978816978>
- David, E. (2020, July 24). Jenelyn Kennedy’s death was senseless – we must all ensure she did not die in vain. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/jul/24/jenelyn-kennedys-death-was-senseless-we-must-all-ensure-she-did-not-die-in-vain>
- Forsyth, M. (2006). Sorcery and the criminal law in Vanuatu. *Lawasia Journal*, 1, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2285232>
- Forsyth, M., & Eves, R. (2015). *Talking it through: Responses to sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices in Melanesia*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/TIT.05.2015>
- Fox, L. (2013, February 7). Woman burned alive for ‘sorcery’ in PNG. *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-07/woman-burned-alive-for-sorcery-in-png/4506452>
- Humble, G. J. (2013). Sorcery and animism in a South Pacific Melanesian context. *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 9(2), 2–20. <https://doi.org/10.32597/jams/vol9/iss2/2/>

- Kuku, R. (2020a, June 25). Woman died in pain: Doc. *The National*. <https://www.thenational.com.pg/woman-died-in-pain-doc>
- Kuku, R. (2020b, June 26). 5yrs of torture. *The National*. <https://www.thenational.com.pg/5yrs-of-torture>
- Kuku, R. (2020c, June 30). Grief, tears over Jenelyn. *The National*. <https://www.thenational.com.pg/grief%e2%80%86tears%e2%80%86over-jenelyn>
- Lepani, T. (2021, March 1). NCD to host first night of Haus Krai. *Post Courier*. <https://postcourier.com.pg/ncd-to-host-first-night-of-haus-krai>
- May, R. J. (2021, February 26). Obituary: Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare. *Devpolicy Blog*. <https://devpolicy.org/obituary-grand-chief-sir-michael-somare-20210226-2>
- Nalu, M. (2013, May 14). Haus krai gains support. *The National*. <https://www.thenational.com.pg/haus-krai-gains-support>
- N'drop in Oceania. (2022, August 10). *Nahau's Haus Krai: National politics, political parties, women's political representation*. [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG7OvA\\_Qy2o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG7OvA_Qy2o)
- Rooney, M. N. (2021, March 30). COVID-19 and the haus krai. *Devpolicy Blog*. <https://devpolicy.org/covid19-and-the-haus-krai-20210330>
- Sen, S., & Kero, G. (2020, September 25). Vale Nahau Rooney. *Devpolicy Blog*. <https://devpolicy.org/vale-nahau-rooney-20200925-2>
- Tekwie, D., & Rooney, M. N. (2021, August 6). Politik meri: Nahau Rooney's haus krai. *Devpolicy Blog*. <https://devpolicy.org/politik-meri-nahau-rooneys-haus-krai-20210806>
- TVWAN Online. (2020, July 10). *Late Jenelyn Kennedy funeral service* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISrrd-Pt8Pk&t=6327s>

# A Kanak way of being to the world:

The appropriation of customary  
diplomatic protocols in new political  
contexts

ANTHONY TUTUGORO<sup>1</sup>

We are in continuity with the thinking of all our elders in Kanak country when they worked for this project to exist, and today it is open to the community of destiny, to all those who arrive by sea and who want to learn about the word of custom, the gestures of custom, identity, our identity. And it is an identity that is not fixed, that is not closed, that is open.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 I would like to thank the various resource persons who have been mobilised to help us conduct this reflection such as: Mickaël Forrest, Emmanuel Tjibaou, Ariel Tutugoro, Jean-Claude Tutugoro, Victor Tutugoro, Franck Wahuzue and Charles Wea. I also would like to thank Gregory Fry, Helen Fraser, George Carter, Gordon Nanau, Nic Maclellan, Lorenz Gonshor, Robert Nicole and reviewers from the Oceanic Diplomacy network. Unless noted, all translations from French are by the author.

2 Speech given by Roch Tindao, President of the Drubea Kapumë Area Council (Luepack & Tjibaou, 2021). The speech was given in 2021 during the ceremony to mark the start of the re-roofing of the Grande Case du Sud ('Grand Hut of the South') built in the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre in the 1990s.

Since the period of violence in the 1980s, the Kanak people, through the signatures of their political representatives, have made their way towards recognition within political agreements in order to establish themselves in the political arena of New Caledonia. They have therefore been able to progressively assert their customary protocols to the point where they have now been reappropriated by the non-Kanak communities. This constitutes a culture of engagement specific to this archipelago that we will attempt to unveil here. In 2021 the pro-independence movement, the main political representative of the Kanak people, for the first time obtained the presidency of the New Caledonian government and, through an alliance with a new party, the *Evêil Océanien*, the majority of the 11 members of this institution. For the second time in its history, it therefore has the institutional levers to best translate its vision of interculturality and its own culture of engagement.

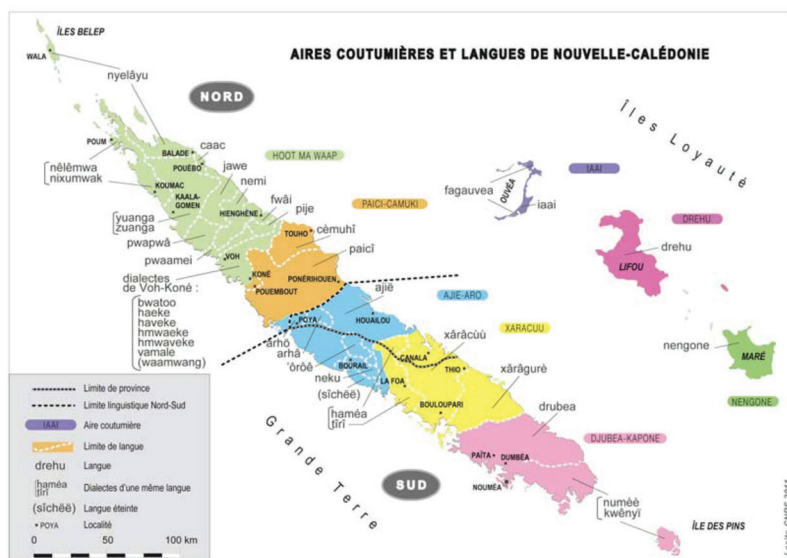
The customary protocols immanent to the roots of Kanak civilisation are increasingly used in New Caledonia to initiate encounters of all kinds, in terms of social, cultural and political practices, by all ethnic forms of the population. It is interesting to observe how these protocols, part of an age-old diplomacy, could – by becoming widespread throughout New Caledonia – progressively become the markers of a diplomacy and a culture of engagement specific to this Pacific territory, which is still under French sovereignty. The question is, therefore, how can the protocols inherent in Kanak culture be transformed into a diplomatic culture of engagement specific to New Caledonia?

We will first see how these ancient protocols are generalised on a national scale by the independence movement. Then we will see in which form they are appropriated by non-Kanak groups, and adopted at an inter-institutional level. Finally, we will consider the possibilities of extending them in an approach to the future of Kanaky and/or New Caledonia<sup>3</sup> diplomacy in the broader Oceanic region.

---

3 The independence movement wants the new state to be called 'Kanak' or 'Kanak-New Caledonia'. 'New Caledonia' is the current name. The archipelago's political future will determine which name will be officially used.

FIGURE 14 CUSTOMARY AREAS AND LINGUISTIC AREAS OF GRANDE TERRE AND THE LOYALTY ISLANDS



Source: Lacito-CNRS, 2011

## Age-old inter-clan practices

Anthropological studies<sup>4</sup> conducted in New Caledonia have highlighted the capacity of the civilisation to welcome the foreigner. In this regard, Jean-Claude Tutugoro<sup>5</sup> provides an analysis of this civilisational attraction:

So for a space, in a space, there can be people,  
there are new people arriving, it has always

4 See, for example, the works of Jean Guiart, Alain Saussol, Alban Bensa, Isabelle Leblic and Patrice Godin.

5 Jean-Claude Tutugoro is the president of a trade union called Front de Luttes Sociales (Social Struggles Front). The particularity of this union is to reflect on a social project for New Caledonia by trying to be a force of proposal for the discussions concerning the future status of the community. Jean-Claude Tutugoro is also in charge of the language and culture development division of the Diocesan Direction of the Catholic School New Caledonia.

been like that in history. Either they get killed, or they kill the others, so there is a civilization, a culture, that disappears on both sides. Or they find the combinations to be together. And that's what happened here. We have always absorbed cultures from elsewhere. If we go deeper, we see that the art of welcoming, the respect for the foreigner, all that, is something we carry within us. It's this mechanism that allows us to anticipate problems. We must never consider foreigners as an enemy. You should even raise them! (Jean-Claude Tutugoro, personal communication, September 9, 2019)

This welcome is done through precise customary protocols. When clans meet on the occasion of an engagement request, a wedding, a birth, a death or a request for forgiveness, customary exchanges are carried out according to precise protocols depending on the geographical area in which one is located. Thus, the rule generalisable to the whole of New Caledonia is that the person who goes to a place presents his or her customary *geste de bonjour*. This mark of respect thanks the living for welcoming the delegation to foreign lands and the non-living for accepting them in the visible and invisible space. These age-old protocols have endured and are scrupulously and systematically applied by each clan. The fear of doing the wrong thing, the desire to prevent any form of bad omen, is a determining factor leading the Kanak people to strictly adhere to these procedures.

During the customary ceremonies carried out to mark the commencement of the re-roofing of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre's Grande Case du Sud, Octave Togna pronounced these words, which summarise one of the fundamentals of Kanak civilisation:

Because the word of our fathers says only one thing, it is the respect that one owes to the master of the land, to the one who owns the entrance to that place. (Luepack & Tjibaou, 2021)

These protocols are carried out in a systematic way for each journey. In the Paicî<sup>6</sup> area, this is known as the *urëpârâ* gesture. Anna Gonari-Diemene<sup>7</sup> gives an explanation of this gesture:

Urëpârâ can be split into 'end', 'extremity', 'the end of'. And pârâ is a 'journey', hence Urëpârâ can be translated as 'the end of the journey'. In fact, this journey takes place in the home of another, in his court and on his land. This gesture is made to the hosts to ask their permission to walk, talk and move freely on their land without disturbing anyone, especially their spirit and their guardian. It is the latter that are referred to in the speeches. In general, it is presented before entering the private perimeter of the hosts, in the courtyard and even before entering the house. This gesture is essential to any exchange. In case of refusal, however rare, nothing will be done. Across the country, practices differ but the meaning does not. It is materialised by a piece of 'manou', a yam, a bouquet or a banknote. (Gonari-Diemene, 2020)

---

6 The Paicî area, the author's region of origin, includes the communes of Ponérihouen, Poindimié and part of the communes of Koné, Pouembout and Poya.

7 Anna Gonari-Diemene is a research fellow at the Académie des Langues Kanak and is originally from the Paicî area.

The *urëpârâ* gesture in the Paicî area is found throughout the Kanak tribes with different names such as *muu fôdô*<sup>8</sup> in the Xârâcùù area and *hure meno*<sup>9</sup> in Hychen, which is part of the Hoot Ma Whaap area (see 14). Its materialisation remains identical throughout Kanak areas even if its name may differ, such as with the gesture of *qëmek*<sup>10</sup> in the Drehu area. Emmanuel Tjibaou explains this entry stage as the foundation or the doorway to any exchange that is going to take place:

The person who is placed in this position of bringing the other into the *coutume de bonjour* is always placed inside the house. Transposed to all customary gestures, this is the basis on which the custom is built ... It always takes place at the entrance to the house or near the door. (Tjibaou & Kona, 2017)

He also provides a look at the state of which this protocol requires.

One of the modalities too ... is that there is only one who speaks ... These are just practical realities, but they also make sense, because at a given moment we delegate to an individual the capacity to introduce the group ... And then, on the humility with which the gesture is made, it's that when I do the custom, I don't 'throw the gesture in the face' [sic]. I am obliged to keep an intensity in this moment because I

---

8 Yvon Kona translates it as 'the end of the walk' (Tjibaou & Kona, 2017).

9 Emmanuel Tjibaou explains that the meaning is the same as in the Paicî region and could be translated as 'the end of the journey' (Tjibaou & Kona, 2017).

10 This would translate as 'the face'. The symbolism here is in that one shows one's face by bowing before entering a case.

wish to inscribe durably, in the moment when the gesture is made, this relation of force that I hold in me, that I concede to the other. (Tjibaou & Kona, 2017)

There is usually a person designated as the master of ceremonies,<sup>11</sup> a customary leader, on the side of the two groups facing each other. These people may simultaneously be the ones designated to speak officially on behalf of the delegation. They may not speak at the time of the speeches, but they will speak to the people in their delegation to guide them through the protocol. If we pay close attention, we can see their concentration on the material elements brought in, on the unfolding of the protocol and on guiding the speaker designated to deliver the customary speech. For example, they can be seen whispering in the speaker's ear before or after he speaks. They are responsible for ensuring that the different stages of the protocol are followed and that they run as smoothly as possible.

On the receiving end, this can also be a person who has already established a relationship with the spokesperson of the visiting group or who has a detailed knowledge of the specificities of the protocol. This spokesman, for example, could be one who has already formed alliances through previous marriages, and is willing to take the floor because he/she will be better able to situate the speech in a denser context by mentioning past relationships.

Beyond saying hello and showing respect, Emmanuel Tjibaou and Yvon Kona explain that this exchange also figuratively contributes to an ongoing connection between the people from different tribes:

When we talk about stopping to say hello, we are building our knowledge. The moment when

---

11 This reflection emerges from personal field notes based on observations of our own clan ürepâra gestures, weddings or mourning protocols and informal discussions held with elders in our home region. The list of these resource people would be too long to present here, but we would like to thank all of them for repeatedly sharing a view on their own society and its processes.

we stop is the moment when we build our experience, our relationship with the other, our relationship with the World. And we also build our culture. (Tjibaou & Kona, 2017)

These thousand-year-old protocols are ultimately a way of renewing links or creating new ones in a spirit of serenity with regard to the visible and the invisible.

In this chapter I am referring to the most elementary protocols of Kanak culture, namely the *geste de bonjour* or arrival. Many other protocols – revolving around births, weddings, requests for forgiveness or mourning – also exist and are carried out according to precise rules specific to each region, but these will not be addressed in this chapter. We will focus our attention here essentially on the *geste de bonjour*. In this regard, Yvon Kona also explains the need to go further through this approach of respect and humility by systematically presenting a *geste d'au revoir*<sup>12</sup> to close the space of speech and seal the link established during this exchange:

This offering is known as the *coutume de bonjour*. Everyone says *coutume de bonjour*, we could also call it *coutume d'arrivée*,<sup>13</sup> since we are arriving. If we do this *coutume de bonjour*, there is surely also the *geste d'au revoir*. Because it works together, it works both ways ... If we talk about the *coutume de bonjour*, we must also talk about the custom for leaving, because you arrive to leave again ... It works both ways, if we want to do things properly. (Tjibaou & Kona, 2017)

---

12 A gesture made by the guests to say goodbye to their hosts. This gesture can also be given by the hosts to their guests to wish them, for example, a safe trip back.

13 Arrival custom.

## The appropriation of Kanak cultural markers by the independence movement

The pro-independence movement, initiated by the Kanak demand for independence, was constituted on the basis of culture in order to establish a certain way of doing politics. This explains why it is often mistakenly called the ‘Kanak independence movement’ although it is not reserved for Kanak people nor is it the property of the Kanak people per se. It is nevertheless true that it has probably been shaped in the image of the cultural legacy of the land from which it emerged.

FIGURE 15: GATHERING IN THE CAR PARK TO COLLECT AND ‘PUT TOGETHER’ THE CUSTOMS OF THE DIFFERENT FLNKS *GROUPES DE PRESSION* BEFORE ENTERING THE SPACE DEDICATED TO THE 35TH FLNKS CONGRESS (GÖRÖJÈPÈ, VALLEY OF NIMBAYES, PONÉRIHOUE, 22 MARCH 2017)



*Photograph by Anthony Tutugoro*

In my field observations since 2017 in New Caledonia, I have been able to detect a certain Kanak way of practising politics and diplomacy. Naturally, many other authors have also highlighted a Kanak way of doing politics.<sup>14</sup> Through these observations, I have been able to detect

<sup>14</sup> See the works of Alban Bensa, Benoît Trépied or Eric Soriano, which all cover the region of Koné, for examples.

a form of transfer of cultural procedures at political events held on weekends in New Caledonia, such as conventions or political congresses (Leblic, 2003). When asked about this, Victor Tutugoro gives us an analysis corroborating this hypothesis:

You did well to mention the preliminaries [see Figure 15] before each meeting. Because, indeed, it is on a customary, clan basis. In the tribe, when there is an event, each clan comes and then makes its contribution. Its contribution to the event that is going to take place. Through all the things that make up the custom. And then also in the word. And afterwards, the one who receives, he says how things are going to happen and then he asks the others if they agree. This is how custom works. And in political matters, it's the same. You have the UC [Union Calédonienne] clan coming, you have the Palika [Parti de Libération Kanak] clan, you have the UPM [Union Progressiste en Mélanésie] clan, you have the RDO [Rassemblement Démocratique Océanien] clan, and then you have the other sub-clans who come on behalf of journalists or associations, or personalities. They come with us. And we make a [gathering gesture]. And then we go to the people who receive us. (Victor Tutugoro, personal communication, May 3, 2022)

In this regard, political gatherings are modelled on the function of the 'master' of ceremonies described above, who also plays the role of the emissary assigned to facilitate the protocol with the hosts.<sup>15</sup> They are

---

15 These practices have been observed through various field observations, for example in Tutugoro, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b.

appointed to accompany the delegation of guests to carry out the various *geste de bonjour* and the *geste d'au revoir*.

For the respondent, this preliminary stage determines the quality of the exchanges that will take place afterwards. It is the cement that allows

FIGURE 16: PRESENTATION OF THE CUSTOMARY GESTURE OF HELLO AND FOOD TO THE HOSTS (RIGHT) TO THE CONGRESS ORGANISING COMMITTEE AND THE LOCAL CUSTOMARY AUTHORITIES (LEFT) (GÖRÖJÈPÈ, VALLEY OF NIMBAYES, PONÉRIHOUE, 22 MARCH 2017)



*Photograph by Marguerite Poigoune, NC La Première, 2017*

everyone to speak freely and respectfully, because everyone will have brought their contribution to honour the receiving delegation from a given space:

And this already determines, it determines from the start because from the biggest to the smallest, you have the right to speak because you brought your thing, you can speak, you brought your contribution, your custom. You can

speak. And afterwards, you'll see that in all the things, we make the word circulate. You have people who intervene naturally, you have others who intervene less. We will always ask them to go, to say things. But afterwards, the decision is not made by a majority. It is taken by consensus. It's the culture of compromise. And so, the final decision is the compromise. That's the one we take. (Victor Tutugoro, personal communication, May 3, 2022)

Charles Wea also considers this form of respect as the basis of relations between militants within the independence movement and which also explains a form of pacified relations, specific to the Kanak political space. This vision is at odds with a vision of politics as a Hobbesian (Hobbes, 1651/2008) place of war of all against all.

What is also important in the way we do politics while integrating our customary values, the aspects of custom, is that we manage to respect each other and at the same time not to go beyond our limits, our criticisms because you know that: 'I respect him because he is my big brother, they are our leaders, they are our little brothers'. (Charles Wea, personal communication, May 5, 2022)

These protocols were eventually appropriated by the other populations living on the archipelago. This eventually made their generalisation at the institutional level gradually obvious.

### **The appropriation of customary gestures by other communities**

The different communities living in the archipelago have gradually adopted these protocols through micro-initiatives, to the point where

institutions practice these protocols on a daily basis, such as the *geste de bonjour* frequently made between institutions (figure 17) or the handover ceremony between Gérard Poadja and Roch Wamytan as President of the Congress of New Caledonia. However, these practices can sometimes be distorted from their original meaning. Indeed, the entirety of these protocols is not yet necessarily integrated by all the components of the New Caledonian population.

Octave Togna delivered a version of what he can already perceive as a generalisation of customary protocol in New Caledonia. For him, there exists through these practices a universal form of mutual respect inherent in intercultural relations:

The Kanak culture today? Everyone does custom today. It is the foundation of relations between citizens today. It gives meaning to the relationship between us. Between us! Even if we are not Kanak. People know, non-Kanak people know, the sense in which, when I share this word, it is of capital importance ... We must never deviate from the fundamentals. And the fundamentals of Kanak culture are universal. First of all, it is respect for others. When we make a custom, we do nothing more than say: 'I respect you, you respect me'. The word we exchange, we must respect it. It is sacred. We translate it into our way of doing things. But these are universal values. They are the values of humanity. We don't do folklore. We build life. When we dance, there is meaning in it. Because we have exchanged words, because we have made the custom. But at the same time, we have to be able to integrate it as a founding element of the society in which we live (Boutures de paroles, 2013).

FIGURE 17: DELEGATIONS FROM VARIOUS CALEDONIAN ASSOCIATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS BROUGHT BY THE CUSTOMARY AREAS OF AIJÉ-ARHO AND XARACUU (LEFT) WITH THE NEW CALEDONIAN GOVERNMENT (RIGHT) TO MAKE THE 'GESTURE OF HELLO' OR 'GESTURE OF ARRIVAL' (YVON KONA DISTINCTION) TO THE CUSTOMARY AUTHORITIES OF THE DRUBEA KAPUMÉ AREA ON THE OCCASION OF THE CALEDONIA FESTIVAL (22 SEPTEMBER 2022)



*Photograph by Anthony Tutugoro*

One also perceives in the discourse, the influence or the indirect reference to the Christian faith as spread by the churches in New Caledonia. Once deeply rooted, they may also have played a role in the generalisation of the universal aspect of mutual respect to be established between the different communities. Although these communities were restricted by the history of New Caledonia, which saw the introduction of the indigenous regime and the capitation tax during the 19th and 20th centuries (Merle & Muckle, 2019), they were able to gradually build bridges between them. One of these bridges would be the implementation by the non-Kanak communities of 'customary gestures', thus responding to point 4 of Nouméa Accord's preamble (Légifrance, 1998):

It is now necessary to lay the foundations for a citizenship of New Caledonia, enabling the original people to form a human community with the men and women who live there, affirming their common destiny....

Ten years later, a new stage should be opened, marked by the full recognition of the Kanak identity, a prerequisite for the rebuilding of a social contract between all the communities living in New Caledonia, and by a sharing of sovereignty with France, on the way to full sovereignty.

When asked about his perception of the appropriation of these gestures by other communities, Victor Tutugoro, a signatory of this agreement, gave a positive answer:

For me, it's positive because it reinforces the idea that there is a Caledonian identity that is being born. The other identities that have arrived are in the process of hanging on to the local identity, they're coming over it. And little by little, something will emerge. (Victor Tutugoro, personal communication, May 3, 2022)

### **Raising protocols to the highest institutional levels**

Progressively, New Caledonia has also seen these customary protocols take place at the highest institutional level within or between New Caledonia's institutions. We will give here a few of the multiple examples that have come to our attention.

On 3 September 2012 for example, a handover ceremony was held at the New Caledonian Congress between Roch Wamytan, from *Union*

*Calédonienne* and Gérard Poadja, of *Calédonie Ensemble*<sup>16</sup>, newly elected to head New Caledonia's legislative body. Both are Kanak, and moreover have customary responsibilities in their respective geographical areas<sup>17</sup>.

Another illustration of this is the inauguration of the Baco Campus, a University of New Caledonia's branch built on customary land, held on 17 July 2020. Delegations from the University of New Caledonia led by elected representatives from the Northern province, the Southern province and the State performed custom to the representatives of the districts of Poindah and Baco, the two customary districts of the municipality of Koné. The purpose of this custom is to say the greetings to the owners of the land and to ask for a guarantee that the students will be able to learn with serenity on this customary land<sup>18</sup>.

There are many examples of the appropriation of the gesture during official visits, as shown by another example given by Victor Tutugoro:

It's true that more and more people are doing it. You see, for example, on Friday, at the Northern province, the president [Paul Néaoutyine] and I, with the staff, received the AFD [Agence Française de Développement<sup>19</sup>] Pacific delegate general. He came with his custom, you see? He put a piece of *manou*<sup>20</sup> on the table and said hello. There were three of them, him and two women, they were all French people from metropolitan

---

16 A non-independence party created at Nouville (Nouméa) on 11 October, 2008.

17 The first is a chief of the Saint-Louis tribe and a grand chief of the Pont-des-Français district, and the second is from the grand chieftaincy of the Poindah district in Koné.

18 The lease is for 70 years.

19 French Development Agency.

20 In New Caledonia, the expression 'un bout de manou' is commonly used to talk about a 'piece of fabric', which is generally used to make a custom.

France ... Yes, people come, people come. (Victor Tutugoro, personal communication, May 2, 2022)

Since 8 July 2021, the FLNKS has obtained for the first time the presidency of the government of New Caledonia in the person of Louis Mapou, thus giving it the opportunity for the first time in the history of the Nouméa Accord to implement its reforms on the executive level. With regard to these practices on the institutional level, the general policy speech delivered by President Louis Mapou sets the tone:

The identity signs that are the official identification mark of New Caledonia are still too timidly used. Our objective is to promote the country's anthem with more enthusiasm. We will ask that it be learned and sung in schools, and that the inscription of the motto and the use of the two flags in the communication of institutions be more rigorous. Furthermore, we will propose that the customary senate conduct a reflection so that the customary gesture, which is very present at all levels in institutional protocols, is made official. (Mapou, 2021)

This momentum reflects the political will of the pro-independence movement in New Caledonia at the institutional level since the signing of the Nouméa Accord. An interview with Déwé Gorodey<sup>21</sup>, another member of the FLNKS, given to Thomas C. Spear, was in line with this:

The identity claim here has always been present on both sides of the political claim. So the cultural question is at the centre of the political debate in this country. Since the Noumea Accord,

---

21 Déwé Gorodey (1 June, 1949–14 August, 2022) passed away during the writing of this chapter. We pay tribute to her engagement and the legacy she raised on New Caledonia patrimony.

which is the framework for the emancipation and decolonisation of this country, states in its preamble that it is necessary to recognise the Kanak identity in order to build citizenship. (Ile en île, 2013)

## The risks of manipulation and misunderstanding

However, this appropriation of the customary gesture by the other communities in the territory can sometimes be misperceived or subject to negative comments if it is poorly carried out or used for devious purposes. This is the case, for example, when it is carried out during political gatherings and distorts the spirit of the gathering. Here is an example of a customary gesture made in Nouméa during the 2020 referendum election campaign. Gilles Brial, second vice president of the Southern province, president of a non-independence political party, the Mouvement Populaire Calédonien (Caledonian People's Movement), gives the customary speech of the *geste coutumier* in order to thank Kanak members of the non-independence movement for their historical engagement on their side. We transcribe a part of this speech here:

We wanted to make this gesture ... [he quotes each political parties engaged in the *geste coutumier*] in the name of all those who are here this evening and more widely in the name of those who defend a Caledonia within France. This gesture, you see the symbols of all the other communities that make up New Caledonia. This gesture is not folklore for us. It's a thank you, a very big sincere thank you for your support, for the fight of your elders, which means that today, the colours that float in this stadium are the 'red, white and blue'! (Les Loyalistes, 2022)

Here the customary gesture is used by non-Kanak towards Kanak members of non-independence parties. Objects symbolising all the communities are placed on the custom made. However, one notices the absence of customary authorities from the Drubéa-Kapoumë area, which custom would like to deny any mention to their names and to the 'clans of the place'.

Victor Tutugoro welcomes the initiatives taken to try to appropriate these gestures of mutual respect. However, they should not mask the colonial realities that shaped the archipelago:

But it is still far from the common destiny. It's hard. Some people say: "Yes! We have a common destiny every day, it's since before, we talked to each other!" Yes, we used to talk to each other, but we stayed in parallel. There are no things that we do in common ... Everyone stays on his own side unfortunately ... parallel! And so yes, from this situation, I say that we must welcome the small gestures which mean that little by little we are moving towards something common ... We can appreciate the small steps that are taken. [...]. [t]he things I've seen done so far, not many, it's true, are done with a certain depth. It's not folklore. But it's true that there's not that much of it! (Victor Tutugoro, personal communication, May 2, 2022)

For Charles Wea, the process of using custom for devious purposes is precisely very undiplomatic.

Then, in the instrumentalization, sometimes, there is a risk of valorizing this protocol or this action. Because often, custom is used to settle this ... often custom is used for political

purposes. But we say that this is not very diplomatic ... in the sense that for us, custom has a very particular meaning. (Charles Wea, personal communication, May 5, 2022)

It is clear that if these customary protocols are generalised, they must not be normalised in a folkloric manner either, at the risk of seeing political instrumentalisation appear *de facto*. This is why initiatives are being taken to raise this culture of engagement to the highest level of New Caledonia's diplomacy, that conducted at the regional and international levels.

### **Bringing the communities into the 'basket': the sacred in the test of union**

It would therefore be appropriate that this new form of diplomacy inherent to New Caledonia must be initiated by the Kanak people, otherwise its meaning would be deprived and misperceived by the Kanak people itself. This is the approach taken by the Agence de Développement de la Culture Kanak (ADCK), for example, and it regularly initiates actions that innovate while trying to conform to the fundamentals of Kanak culture. Thus, when the roof of the *grande case du Sud* of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre was re-roofed, a symbolic step was taken to bring the communities together through common diplomatic markers. This step, rooted in an oceanic diplomacy in a permanent process of renewal<sup>22</sup>, could give a new lease of life to the future New Caledonia's diplomacy.

---

22 This expression is translated from French '*reformulation permanente*', which is a concept developed by Jean-Marie Tjibaou considering that returning to tradition is a myth. Kanak culture is always Kanak culture, and is nourished by the time of yesterday and today in order to face the challenges of tomorrow. As he explained in an interview with *Les Temps Modernes* on March 1985, republished in the book *Kanaky*: 'The return to tradition is a myth – I keep saying this over and over again; it is a myth. No people has ever done it. I see the search for identity, for a model, as being ahead of us, never in the past – it's a permanent process of renewal. I feel that what we're striving for at the moment is to bring as much as we can of our past and our culture into constructing the personal and social models we want to guide the building of our polity. Some might view it differently, but that is the way I see it myself. Our identity is ahead of us. At the end, after we are dead, people will take our picture and put it on the wall, and it will help them fashion their own identity. Otherwise, you never move out of your father's shadow, you've had it.' (J. M. Tjibaou, 2005, p. 160)

To introduce this paragraph, let us use the words of Octave Togna to define the challenge of living together in New Caledonia and how to ensure that the cultural can be anchored in the institutional:

This is still a bit difficult today. We have the Kanak puzzle, which remains unfinished, because the puzzle of other cultures needs to be impregnated with it so that we can give meaning to our common destiny. It's not just words. And I measure how lucky I am to be living in this time. I don't think there are many in the world who have the chance to live what we are living here. To build a country and to ensure that our cultures are impregnated in institutions. (Boutures de paroles, 2013)

In parallel with this idea, the ADCK in 2021, while repairing the roof of the *grande case du Sud* built in 1998 at the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, decided to take a new step in the possibility of seeing the communities of New Caledonia gather around the fundamentals of Kanak culture. Here is how Emmanuel Tjibaou explains the approach to the representatives of these communities of Wallisian and Futunian (figure 18), Indonesian, Arab, Creole or European origin:

In 2008, when we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Centre, we invited the communities: the Wallisians, the Indonesians, the pioneers, the Europeans, etc. to plant trees there. Today, we said we were going to change the straw in the southern hut. You have to think that in 2008, they planted trees but we are inside the hut and they are outside. So we came to get you the other day on Monday to do the custom because the idea is not just to change the straw, but also to put their things in the *case du Sud*. So that when we make

the fire in the *case*, there is also their story. We have the right to tell their story next to us. That means that we will go and get them and then we will ask them to put something of theirs next to us. We're always there, we're around the fire, and we'll ask them to come into the *case*. And we'll hang up some of their things in the *case*.

The basket represents the sacred part of the *case*, where the strength, powers and medicines of the clan are stored. It is unreachable because of its height. Thus, it is the bridge between the living and the non-living, the visible and the invisible and is the place where the clan's power remains. Here is how Emmanuel Tjibaou describes the process:

That way, when we visit, we'll say, 'Here they are with us too.' In the *case*, the framework, the poles, the chiefs from here, the landowners, the customary authorities. Then those around us, they arrived later, but they are the ones who carry the country, who bring it. ... They'll know that they have their place with their brothers. (Luepack & Tjibaou, 2021)

This initiative requires all its strength. By integrating highly symbolic elements of these communities into the basket, the initiative does not only help to unite the communities on the occasion of a day of sharing. It permanently, if not eternally, establishes them in a visible and invisible bridge. These communities are thus no longer outside the *case*, but are an integral part of the hut. In order to define a diplomacy specific to New Caledonia where all the populations would be able to recognise and integrate themselves, this prerequisite seems vital.

FIGURE 18: THE CUSTOMARY ENTRY OF THE WALLISIAN AND FUTUNIAN COMMUNITY BRINGING THE SYMBOLIC TANOA THAT WILL BE BRING INTO THE GRANDE CASE DU SUD BASKET AND WELCOMED BY THE CUSTOMARY AUTHORITIES OF THE DRUBEA-KAPOMÈ AREA]



*Photograph by Nicolas Petit for Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes, 2020*

## **A generalisation of these protocols at an international level?**

The FLNKS actors interviewed perceive a similarity in the Melanesian Spearhead Group's (MSG) decision-making protocols with those of the FLNKS:

You see when we go to the *Fer de Lance*. It's the same thing! We spread the word. The Fijis say that, the Salomon say that, the Papuans say that, the Kanaks say that. And then the word goes round and round and round: "Can we agree on that? On such and such a compromise?" It's exactly the same (laughs). But the culture of

compromise. You see what the Europeans can't do. They are majority-minority, right away. But the others here, they come up with it. (Victor Tutugoro, personal communication, May 2, 2022)

What makes the fundamental difference with Western diplomacy here would be the compromise in the respect of the other's position:

Compromise, you talk, you say your things, but you also listen to the other. And what we're going to remember is that it's not because you're bigger, you shouted louder, you got more money than the other guy. What we're going to remember is what everyone else said. That's the thing we remember. You say but you also listen to others. So, when you go to execute the decision afterwards, you do so because it is the decision that has come out of there where everyone finds themselves from the biggest to the smallest. But not everyone has ... I see at the *Fer de Lance* [MSG], it works like that. How do you make yourself heard? Even if you don't say much, in the end you are asked about your acceptance of the result that came out. (Victor Tutugoro, personal communication, May 2, 2022)

For Charles Wea, travel and experience across the Pacific is a learning force for Oceanic diplomacy. At present, he does not yet detect the features of this culture of engagement on the scale of New Caledonia, a territory still sclerosed with the stigma of colonialism:

It is in the Pacific that I learned a lot about Oceanian protocol and the value of Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian protocols because I have been in contact with these people a lot. And

I have seen the important diplomatic dimension, I weigh my words, of how our leaders and our officials often manage to resolve or find solutions to any conflict or any issue. When you arrive in the Pacific, you feel at home. People welcome you as if you were part of the same family. And that's what I don't find here in New Caledonia. Of course, because of the colonial system we are in. And I think we have a lot to learn, especially in Oceanian diplomacy. Because I think that Oceanian diplomacy is not only about politics, about economics or even about climate change. It's about how we people interact with each other. We interact in our practices, in our encounters, the way you talk, the way you smile, the way you greet. (Charles Wea, personal communication, May 5, 2022)

For the protagonists interviewed in this research, the use of customary protocols on a diplomatic level by New Caledonia would be beneficial. For Charles Wea, it would be a question of giving these protocols their rightful place through state recognition, in the image of the Matthew and Hunter protocol between the FLNKS and Vanuatu<sup>23</sup>:

And we want to use our customs and traditions to settle our conflicts. Because the objective is to consolidate our families, to strengthen our relationships. (Charles Wea, personal communication, May 5, 2022)

For Victor Tutugoro, it would be a matter of copying the protocols that are done on the MSG scale on the diplomatic level of New Caledonia

---

23 See chapter 12 in this volume, 'The Keamu Accord, *kastom* and maritime boundaries' by Nic Maclellan.

with the particularities of the customary protocols inherent to the Kanak civilisation:

Because you see what the president of the government does, him before [Former non-independence president of the Government of New Caledonia], I call that folklore. Because he does it, he gives the Kanak gesture but there is no Kanak with them. It's not deep, there's no depth. It's a bit of folklore. He does it like that because that's the way it is. He should do what they do, what I've just told you: you go and find the local customary people or the Customary Senate and you do things with them. To do a real welcoming ceremony. Before doing the meetings that they organise. He should, he should (...). He should. Every time there is a meeting of the countries of the region, everyone gathers, for example, at the Customary Senate and the customary welcome takes place. This is what should be done. And then, the work is done. The next day, for example. (...) That would be great! To say that there is ... you are in Melanesia! Whether you're in Caledonia, Kanaky, Fiji or the Solomon, or even Australia, Australia is a land of Melanesia, well there's the Melanesian welcome. It may change depending on where you are but the meaning is there. (Victor Tutugoro, personal communication, May 2, 2022)

FIGURE 19: THE 17TH GOVERNMENT OF NEW CALEDONIA (REPRESENTED BY ITS PRESIDENT, LOUIS MAPOU AND ONE OF ITS MEMBER MICKAËL FORREST, ON THE RIGHT) VISITING FIJI'S GOVERNMENT (HERE JONE USAMATE, MINISTER FOR LANDS AND MINERAL RESOURCE, ON THE LEFT) ON 4 AUGUST 2022 AND DOING THE GESTE DE BONJOUR



*Photograph from the Facebook page of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources of the Fiji government, 2022*

## Conclusion

A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since Jean-Marie Tjibaou repeatedly expressed his wish for a sovereign 'Kanak'. The foundations of his political thinking were to create the conditions for a Kanak country populated by citizens capable of adopting the cultural codes, a culture of engagement, endemic to the archipelago:

So as part of our claim for independence, we decided we would be called 'Kanak' and our country 'Kanak'. Those who are prepared, as Cook was, to acknowledge us and make custom could eventually, if they want to take it that far, gain Kanak nationality. But above all, whether citizens or not, if they live in the Kanaks' country,

they will be living in Kanaky. It's about history, the search for dignity and the acknowledgement of our people<sup>24</sup>.

Almost forty years after this thought was captured in the corridors of time, New Caledonia is still not sovereign. However, it can be seen that within French sovereignty, and through the independence movement, the Kanak civilisation manages to preserve thousand-year-old customary protocols. Initially from a militant level, it has been able to export them on a 'country' and institutional levels. The prolonged practice of legislative and executive powers intrinsic to the powers derogated from New Caledonia has enabled it to gradually extend these *gestes coutumiers* on both an institutional and social level. We have attempted to reveal examples of initiatives desired or recommended by some of the actors in this political movement. It will be relevant to observe in the coming years how these different protocols will be distilled in a context where the archipelago will be called upon to occupy a more important diplomatic space in the Pacific region and worldwide (Figure 19).

## References

- Boutures de paroles. (2013, November 16). *Tout le monde fait la coutume aujourd'hui* [Everyone does custom today] [Film documentary]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wt624aKFwWM>
- Gonari-Diemene, A. (2020). *Terre de parole* [Land of words] [Radio broadcast]. Radio Nouvelle-Calédonie la 1ère.
- Hobbes, T. (2008). *Leviathan: Or the matter, forme, and power of a commonwealth ecclesiasticall and civil* (M. Oakeshott, Ed.). Atria Books (Original work published 1651).

---

24 Interview given to Alain Plagne on 6 May 1985 in Tjibaou, 2005, p. 177.

- Ile en île. (2013, June 2). *Déwé Gorodé, 5 Questions pour Île en île* [Déwé Gorodé, 5 questions for island hopping] [Video interview]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX0VS2vO3FM>
- Leblic, I. (2003). *De la démocratie à la base : Coutume et militantisme kanak dans les années 1985-1986* [From democracy to the grassroots: Kanak custom and militancy in the years 1985–1986]. In J. M. Regnault (Ed.), *François Mitterrand et les territoires français du Pacifique (1981–1988). Mutations, drames et recompositions ; enjeux internationaux et franco-français* (p. 311–317 and 318–319). Les Indes savantes, Paris. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00201023>
- Légifrance. (1998). *Accord sur la Nouvelle-Calédonie signé à Nouméa le 5 mai 1998* [Agreement on New Caledonia signed in Noumea on May 5, 1998]. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000555817/0>
- Les Loyalistes. (2022, October 1). *Revoir le dernier meeting pour le NON. Nouméa, stade de Magenta, jeudi 1er octobre 2020* [Replay of the last NO meeting. Nouméa, Magenta Stadium, Thursday 1 October 2020]. [Video recording]. Facebook. [https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=684841762381866&external\\_log\\_id=b6ea965c-40ad-4b45-85c1-e7a3320ca971&q=meeting%20cloture%20%20voix%20du%20non%202020](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=684841762381866&external_log_id=b6ea965c-40ad-4b45-85c1-e7a3320ca971&q=meeting%20cloture%20%20voix%20du%20non%202020)
- Luepack, N., & Tjibaou, E. (2021). *Maxha, relever la tête* [Maxha, raise your head] [Film documentary]. Foulala Productions. <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/docu-maxha-relever-la-tete-film-en-competition-au-19e-fifo-1224762.html>
- Mapou. L. (2021, November 25). *Déclaration de politique générale: Monsieur Louis Mapou, Président du 17e gouvernement de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* [General policy statement: Louis Mapou, President of the 17th Government of New Caledonia] [Speech transcript]. Government of New Caledonia. [https://gouv.nc/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2021.11.25\\_dpg\\_louis\\_mapou\\_version\\_revisee.pdf](https://gouv.nc/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2021.11.25_dpg_louis_mapou_version_revisee.pdf)

- Merle, I., & Muckle, A. (2019). *L'indigénat. Genèses dans l'Empire français. Pratiques en Nouvelle-Calédonie* [The Indigénat and France's Empire in New Caledonia: Origins, Practices and Legacies]. CNRS-Editions. <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01971583>
- Tjibaou, E., & Kona, Y. (2017, August 3). *Aux racines de la coutume* [At the roots of custom] [Conference recording]. Médiathèque de l'Agence de Développement la Culture Kanak (Fonds Rencontre de la Médiathèque, Notice 42651). <http://mediatheque.adck.nc/>
- Tjibaou, J. M. (2005). *Kanaky* (H. Fraser & J. Trotter, Trans.). Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University.
- Tutugoro, A. (2017). *35th FLNKS Congress (day 1)* [Fieldnote], copy in possession of the author.
- Tutugoro, A. (2018). *36th FLNKS Congress (day 1)* [Fieldnote], copy in possession of the author.
- Tutugoro, A. (2019a). *37th FLNKS Congress* [Fieldnote], copy in possession of the author.
- Tutugoro, A. (2019b). *FLNKS Convention* [Fieldnote], copy in possession of the author.

# Traditional diplomacy in the Mortlock Islands<sup>1</sup>

GONZAGA PUAS

Diplomacy is a fundamental and intricate part of Mortlockese political history and continuity. Like their traditional sailing mats made from pandanus leaves, strands are woven together to harness the oceanic winds to control the movement of the canoe as it navigates itself upon the turbulent sea. This movement is about negotiating successive waves of uncertainties to enable the canoe to get to its final destination. Sailing created a network of sea lanes for inter-island interactions throughout history. It developed people's characters and personalities as well as shaping communities to coexist harmoniously. The sea is therefore the birthplace of Mortlockese diplomacy, wherein all interactions with and across the sea work to maintain peace and harmony across the region. Traditional diplomacy remains at the heart of social relations

---

1 This chapter is written by the author largely to reconstruct an historical past based on his personal experience and oral histories. There remains a poverty of written information about traditional diplomacy and how it was conducted prior to and during the early engagement with the outside world beyond the Pacific Islands. Mortlockese Micronesians have not abandoned their traditional diplomatic doctrines borne from their own experiences rooted in their understanding of their history and the surrounding environment. The doctrines are premised on the interrelationship between humans in relation to the heavens, the sea and the dispersed nature of the scattered islands.

of the Mortlockese, as a distinct group of indigenous people with a unique identity in the contemporary world. It has also been a tool for defusing tensions between the Islanders as well as in the management of undesirable influence emanating from beyond the horizon. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss traditional diplomacy in the Mortlock region, and how such diplomacy was developed and sustained by the inhabitants of this low-lying chain of islands throughout history. Moreover, the activities outlined here are also presented as a deep cultural reflection of the Islanders' own intellectual prowess in the maintenance of their independence and thus continuity.

## Geography

The Mortlock Islands are part of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), situated in the state of Chuuk. It is a collection of many low-lying islands with extensive sea spaces and communities that share common customs and traditions. The oceanic environment and the climate largely influence the way spaces are controlled, allocated and utilised with respect to defined social identities in the Islands' social and political hierarchy. The FSM archipelagos are made up of three types of islands (Alkire, 1977, p. 5): volcanic high islands, low-lying atolls, and standalone islands. Typical atolls are encircled by coral reefs with a deep lagoon, while standalone islands are completely surrounded by the sea (Alkire, 1977, p. 5). Volcanic islands have more land-based resources than the other types of islands.

The FSM is located in the north-west Pacific just above the equator from Papua New Guinea, west of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and east of the Philippines. It is organised into four states and many island municipalities. There are more than 600 islands dispersed in a vast oceanic area with a population estimated to be around 110,000.<sup>2</sup> It has

---

2 Marcus Samo, secretary of the FSM Department of Health and Social Affairs, Palikir, Pohnpei, personal communication, November 20, 2022. Samo estimated that the population of the FSM at around one hundred thousand or more, including those in the diaspora.

four main languages: Chuukese, Pohnpeian, Kosraean and Yapese. There are four major economic hubs located on the islands of Weno (Chuuk State), Tofol (Kosrae State), Kolonia (Pohnpei State) and Colonia (Yap State). These state capitals are the centres of political, social and economic activities; they are the gateways to the nation.

The Mortlock Islands form a large region of the state of Chuuk. It consists of 11 islands divided into three subregions. The islands of Nama, Losap and Pis form the subregion of the Upper Mortlocks. The Mid Mortlocks consist of the islands of Namoluk, Ettal, Moch and Kuttu. Ta, Satowan, Lukunor and Oneop form the Lower Mortlock subregion. These islands are connected by ancient sea lanes that crisscross the region (Marshall, 2004, Chapter 1). Historically, the sea lanes have been a conduit for the inter-island movement of the population and material goods, as well as for communication and the cross-pollination of ideas, following the pattern of the inter-island migration network. Inter-island movement also established human interaction, enabling the Mortlockese<sup>3</sup> to develop diplomatic doctrines for the purpose of perpetuating peaceful continuity.

Colonists from distant lands tried to disrupt the Mortlockese world in the imperial era by introducing agents of change, whereupon a new order was imposed but met with diplomatic resistance. Today, globalisation presents new sets of diplomatic challenges. However, the indigenous Islanders continue to exercise their own diplomatic skills to negotiate circumstances that threaten to rupture their continuity.

## Contextualising traditional diplomacy

Historically, the Mortlockese have proven to be skilful and knowledgeable people who have managed their relationships with each other and their

---

3 The Mortlock Islands were sighted by Captain Mortlock and thus named after him. However, the indigenous name for the islands is Namoi.

environment to sustain their identity (Alkire, 1999; Lobban & Scheffer, 1997, pp. 269–271, 288–294). They are active agents in the production and reproduction of their own history (Chappell, 2013, pp. 144–145). For instance, oral history speaks of local agencies as always being active throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods. This local perspective represents the most comprehensive statement of the region's history, identity and survival to date (D'Arcy, 2003; Hanlon, 1989).

Mortlockese diplomacy, like its seas, is fluid, dynamically subtle and inherently complex, with its own undercurrents. Deep human relations and the surrounding environment embody the Micronesian continuity. Diplomacy is part of the Islanders' historical process to balance internal coherence as well as to defend themselves from unscrupulous foreign intrusion. Traditional diplomacy has been manufactured, reproduced, enhanced and transported in time and space to sustain the future outlook of the Mortlockese.

By and large, traditional diplomacy is linked to Mortlockese doctrines of navigation, social relations and management of the environment. These elements embrace the relationship between humans, rooted in the understanding of nature's temperament from the surrounding seas, the heavenly sky and the dispersed nature of the Islands (Puas, 2021). The Mortlockese perceived these three elements as the embodiment of the unity between humans and the natural world. This interaction with continuous or seasonal elements of the natural world taught the Mortlockese about patience, respect and humility. Such interactions also deepen human relationships in terms of their adaptation to evolving historical circumstances. Traditional diplomacy has been part of the Islanders' regular interactions and has been refined over the centuries as a tool designed to maintain interdependency between the indigenous people. Moreover, diplomacy is, by and large, linked to important historical practices occurring in nature and its impact on the Mortlockese people. For example, typhoons or tidal waves forced people to travel between islands to provide assistance to other humans or

negotiate for needed resources in order to survive (D'Arcy, 2008). Such practices enriched Mortlockese modes of engagement in the production and enhancement of social relations conducive to the perpetuation of harmonious coexistence and continuity. Also, diplomacy established social protocols that defined the parameters and standards for social behaviour with dignity, thus enhancing customs and traditions (D'Arcy, 2008).

In the pre-colonial past, each of the islands had its own government and was independent of the others, but they were usually linked through intermarriage. Boundaries were clearly demarcated, and transparent marking indicated which island controlled which resources. For example, land and sea markers were established to prevent intruders from harvesting resources. Markers also demanded the adherence to specific behaviour of sailors during voyages when visiting relatives and trading partners.<sup>4</sup> Island security was tightly controlled by the ascribed *samol* (chief) or by shared responsibilities by the various coexisting clans on each island. When a fleet of sailing canoes (*pwoon waa*)<sup>5</sup> approached an island, it had to exhibit specific behaviour as demanded by the markers, or else the canoe would be deemed a threat. Foreknowledge of protocols by the chief navigator (*sou palou*)<sup>6</sup> was required to save lives, as markers had special meanings. As landfall was within reach, sea markers signalled when canoes had to fold the sail, paddle gently and await further signals from the host to approach the designated channels assigned to the

---

4 Felix Naich (a local historian from Lekiniokh Island) recounted oral history confirming the trading activities between the Chuuk Lagoon and the Mortlockese. During one of the trading seasons, a sailing fleet from Lukunor stopped by Losap Lagoon, in the Upper Mortlocks, on an uninhabited island called Piafo (meaning new beach). After they rested, the chief applied his magical chant to drag Piafo behind his sailing canoe to Lukunor for his son. Piafo is now standing on the northern reef of Lukunor. The people of the Mortlocks still talk about this powerful event. It served as a connection between the two islands of Losap and Lukunor.

5 *Pwoon waa* refers to many sailing canoes going to different islands to undertake or be part of a big event.

6 *Sou palou* is the master navigator who possessed all the knowledge of the universe and is also a spokesperson for a voyaging party.

different cluster of village homes. Disrespecting established markers and protocols could attract immediate violence. In other words, traditional diplomacy was established and practised to prevent unexpected violence between islands.

Many social and political situations – such as warfare, marriage proposals, adoption, threat and the formation of political alliances – required different diplomatic skills to control the emergence or spread of violence. Each of these situations called for different strategies to allow proper communication channels to maintain a peaceful status quo. This was because seemingly singular or isolated events often carried large and long-term implications for the parties concerned. For example, marriage (*pupulu*)<sup>7</sup> was not just between the man and the woman, but involved the whole extended family or clans, particularly if the marriage involved people from different islands. Marriage epitomised a large-scale undertaking between two large extended families. It also set the course of a new relationship (and possible alliance) between clans to extend their influence.

## Diplomacy and marriage proposal

Prior to a marriage taking place, investigation had to be undertaken by both families to evaluate the backgrounds of the prospective bride and groom. Chief among these considerations was whether or not the prospective couple were related by blood, and this was determined by tracing the origins of their ancestors. In Island terms, it is referred to as *riri fengen lon ew sha*<sup>8</sup> – a social taboo that has been strictly observed throughout history. If it was confirmed that the prospective couple were

---

7 *Pupulu* is a traditional term for common law marriage or modern forms of marriage as recognised by the law.

8 *Riri fengen lon ew sha* means human connection by one blood, and it is very important to Islanders' social relations. People from the same blood line cannot marry each other, as it is a social taboo.

not related by blood, then the first step in the marriage process could be triggered. That is, preparation to meet the prospective bride's family by the groom's family was initiated. For example, a special meeting of the elders (of both genders) of the man's extended family would be arranged. This was to discuss the set protocols of the marriage proposal (*fetal*)<sup>9</sup> and the strategies needed to be exercised to ensure the success of the proposal. According to custom, a marriage proposal was akin to the lifting of a very heavy log (*pwekipwek shou*)<sup>10</sup> that requires many hands to assist. Members of the man's family needed to exercise care and tact in the allocation of different roles to play in the marriage negotiation process.

Once the man's family was ready, a middle-rank person would be dispatched to the woman's family to announce that on a specific night the man's extended family would be coming to the woman's residence to request the marriage union. A convenient venue would be arranged for negotiation between the two parties. The woman's extended family would follow shared protocols to prevent tension arising, as it was the responsibility of the host family to prevent such an occurrence. The arrangement of speakers, in particular in relation to who should respond to which speaker on the other side, required tight control. This was to ensure that people's positions in the social hierarchy were properly acknowledged and treated with respect. Food and drinks were also the responsibility of the host family, to show their hospitality and humility to the other side. There was also a proper order in which food and drinks should be served, to reflect the ranks of the people who were in attendance.<sup>11</sup>

---

9 *Fetal* means walking. However, it is also a metaphoric term use for marriage proposals.

10 *Pwekipwek shou* means carrying a very heavy log together. Asking for a marriage, especially on the part of the man, requires many relatives to accompany him to ask the woman's family. It is also a sign of respect and humbleness towards the same family.

11 *Mongon atiwatew* refers to food and drink served by the hosting family. It is an important part of the Islands' welcoming rituals.

On the night of the marriage proposal (*tungoren pupulu*),<sup>12</sup> the man's side would assemble outside the woman's compound. An appointed person (or persons) would usher in the man's family to the designated place where the two sides would engage in deep discourses of the *tungoren pupulu*. Informal conversation and icebreakers from both sides would ensue to clear the way for the actual *tungor* to start<sup>13</sup>. The timing as to when to open formal dialogue rested in the hands of the main spokesperson from the man's family. He would greet the woman's family first with traditional salutation, followed by conveying the purpose of their *fetal* in 'metaphoric language', to reflect the depth of cultural knowledge of negotiation and also to convey the seriousness of their intention. The other side would respond by acknowledging the commentaries, again using the high language of diplomacy to show respect, humility and courtesy.

When both sides finished their opening remarks, then food and drinks would be served by the host. This signalled that the man's family was welcome to pursue their objective and that the chosen speakers could have their input. The spokesperson from the man's side followed the order of the assigned speakers, as previously arranged before the *fetal*. The use of special language was not required at this point, as the dialogue centred on the history of the clans' relationships and their place within the Island community. A general biography of the man seeking marriage, and the benefits that could result from the union between the couple, would be the point of concentration. Others would speak about the woman's suitability to marry the man, to provoke positive feelings in relation to the proposal for all involved. The floor would be opened to anyone after all the traditional dignitaries were finished speaking.

---

12 *Tungoren pupulu* means to ask for marriage if the marriage has not been arranged by two families. Wife stealing was also a mode of *pupulu* but a very risky undertaking.

13 *Tungor* refers to the man's request for the hand of the lady in marriage, with the approval of her extended family.

The dialogue went on for as long it took. After all the speeches and commentaries were heard and questions answered, then the master of ceremonies from the *tungor* side would signal the end of it. The last part of the dialogue was reserved for the prospective couple. The man would be given the opportunity to express his views and general feelings regarding the reasons for wanting to marry the woman, so that the mother and father could hear. After the man declared his undying love for the woman, the mother and father would ask their daughter about her decision. If the marriage proposal was not accepted, the main speaker from the woman's side would create a proper channel of communication to soften any ill feeling or embarrassment arising from the man's side. For example, the speaker would point to a future time to meet again so as to allow the man to pursue his marriage proposal. This was also a way for the woman's family to test the enduring strength of the man's feelings towards the woman, as part of the culturally valued doctrine of patience.<sup>14</sup> If the daughter accepted the proposal, then a short speech from the man's family had to be made for the purpose of thanking the host family for their hospitality and kindness in allowing the groom to marry the daughter.

The next step in the process is called *kofot*.<sup>15</sup> This is the stage in which the couple were engaged to each other. While the engagement was underway, customary practice dictated that the man should begin to assist the woman's family with its daily tasks. This is the time for the woman's family to be cautious, and to make further judgement regarding the groom as to his character, personality and suitability for the marriage. This was the crucial point in the relationship process, as the final decision rested with the woman's family. In some instances, the proposed marriage could be

---

14 Patience is a key element in a negotiation process and derived from the island doctrine of sailing on the sea where one has to wait for a long time to reach an island. It also stemmed from fishing with patience, as it is never certain when a fish is going to be caught.

15 *Kofot* is the stage when a couple are engaged to each other. This is when the prospective groom spends his time assisting the prospective bride. It is a critical time to judge the prospective groom further to ensure he fits into the woman's family.

called off if the woman's family judged that the man would bring more problems, particularly if issues emerged about the man's past behaviour. However, if there were no issues arising, his acceptance into the woman's family was sealed. The arrival of an offspring would officiate the final stage of the marriage union (*ra oson pupulu*).<sup>16</sup>

## Conflict and diplomacy

The diplomatic continuum of actions encompassed different degrees of problems, from petty issues to criminal conduct. Traditional diplomacy was the best avenue to provide solutions. The bigger the problem was, the more intensive negotiation would be, particularly in cases where two islands were involved. Such issues needed to be resolved as soon as possible. That is because the longer the problem remained unresolved, the greater the likelihood the problem would intensify. The idea was to solve the issue diplomatically before violence could arise leading to full-scale warfare (*moun*)<sup>17</sup> between the island clans. War could also escalate as other clans were drawn in through their inter-clan alliances.

Conflict and its unfavourable consequences could leave deep and long-lasting political scars in the Island communities. Such scars could lead to a long period of simmering political anxiety that could resurface in future years. This could open a new cycle of skirmishes on their frontier between the opposing sides. As with marriage proposals, ongoing diplomatic dialogue needed to remain open so as to extinguish the problem as soon as possible. There were roles to be played, protocols to follow and strategies to be implemented in order to reach a desirable outcome, all under the guidance of the *samol* on both sides.

Historically, there were many causes of island conflicts, which ranged from petty crimes, such as theft and public humiliation (especially

---

16 *Ra oson pupulu* refers to a permanent marriage and the establishment of an alliance between the two families.

17 *Moun* refers to war or any elements of conflict, including psychological warfare and threatening gestures to invoke fear in the opposing party.

against elders), to bigger issues such as adultery, manslaughter and murder. The intensity of diplomatic solutions was dependent on the type of crimes committed. For example, stealing coconuts would not attract physical fighting between opposing groups. However, theft of fish on someone else's reef, particularly when an extended family had foreclosed fishing to honour the death of someone important in the family, could lead to physical violence.<sup>18</sup> Murder often involved the whole extended family clan pursuing the old mantra of an eye for an eye. Another cause of warfare was the invasion of an island by another island for economic reasons. A full-scale war between opposing allies could be the result at this level.

In the Mortlocks, alliances were formed to provide assistance to each other, particularly during warfare, famine and post-typhoon destruction. The Mortlockese were very conscious of adhering to protocols, as any violation of protocols could mean a break-up of alliances that might be vital in future times of hardship and need. Deep knowledge of diplomacy based on deep knowledge of history at the highest level was often used to maintain order within the alliance system. For instance, inter-island protocols could underscore a fleet of canoes delivering assistance as well as paying tribute to their paramount *samol* island where the clan originated from. During the voyage, the chief navigator or *itang*<sup>19</sup> would give instructions to the sailors in terms of social etiquette and protocols when approaching a different island unexpectedly. Should this unexpected arrival occur, the chief navigator would initiate an intricate chant of greetings and apology to the prospective host in a special language.<sup>20</sup> The host *itang* would read the meaning underlying the special language and respond in a manner which was only understood by the intruder's *itang*.

---

18 *Pwau* is the closing off of an area of land or a reef, wherein the public is not allowed to take any resources from the restricted area.

19 *Itang* is a special person who possessed all the knowledge about different issues in terms of diplomacy and social etiquette.

20 Chants have meanings and were used to appease the island chief or *itang*. Chants were composed historically and passed down through the generations. Each chant is related to specific events and rituals. These chants are still in practice in important events. Also see Kim, 2023, pp. 100–101.

The opposing *itang* could use doubletalk or reverse psychology to warn the travelling party that they were not welcome to his island. In this scenario, the travelling *itang* would make plausible excuses and immediately set sail again. If the host *itang* welcomed the unexpected visitors, the visiting *itang* would exercise cautionary measures to ensure the safety of his party. He must read into the mixed dynamics of behaviour exhibited by the host. For example, he would observe the manner in which the sleeping space was organised and how food was presented, since traditional rituals have deep meanings and were often concealed. Concealment of meanings was part of the psychological warfare between opposing *itang*. Also, subtleties in conversation also had social meanings that both *itang* were acutely aware of. The travelling *itang* could predict danger and had to alert his party clandestinely of such a danger, and how to avoid it. If he could, he would find opportunities to manipulate the situation to reverse the anticipated danger or, alternatively, to win over the host. Avoiding danger in a volatile situation would increase the reputation of a skilful *itang*.

### **Sou afor and diplomacy**

Third-party intervention was a common practice of diplomacy exercised throughout the Mortlock region. The inclusion of a third party referred to as *sou afor*, from the highest social rank,<sup>21</sup> usually a *samol* of good reputation from one of the chiefly clans, was necessary to provide a neutral intermediary to bring together the opposing sides. This could be seen by the community as a genuine support to enable the opposing parties to enter into serious negotiations to resolve their conflict. Moreover, the *sou afor* was also feared, as he could be dragged into the conflict should he not be treated respectfully during negotiations.<sup>22</sup> The *sou afor* must be

---

21 *Sou afor* is a third party and considered as an outstanding negotiator who can assist two warring parties to settle their dispute. He commanded respect and had a great reputation. Disrespecting him had severe consequences.

22 The fear of humiliating the *sou afor* invoked deep analysis from both parties to try to come to a conclusion to settle their dispute.

steeped in the knowledge of the region so as to facilitate communication and also to manage any embarrassment arising if one party was not in the position to agree to a proposed outcome. Also, historical knowledge allowed the *sou afor* to extract known strategies relevant to the present circumstances of conflict.

The process of negotiation often began by outlining the history of the two opposing clans in order to establish a connection between them. That is because the history of clan relations is considered a bridge between both sides that validates why they must abandon being enemies. They should make efforts to work towards a peaceful settlement because of their historical relationship. For example, at the outset of negotiation, the *sou afor* would select a particular event in history to initiate the point of discourse. He would then connect the event to other series of events that connected to the current situation. The other side would listen attentively, and at the end of the third party's narrative, the disputing parties would validate or invalidate the narrator's historical interpretation.<sup>23</sup> The form of historical narration evoked the doctrines of travelling on the sea where the crew were required to listen intently to their chief *palou* (navigator) because their lives depended on the *palou*'s knowledge.

Metaphorically, the display of knowledge was connected to the *palou* being surrounded by a constellation of stars in the universe, wherein he studiously mapped out his course during a voyage. For example, the navigator picks a guiding star as a reference point at the outset of his journey. He then relates that star to other stars during the journey to get to his specific destination, while being mindful of the subtleties of the waves, currents and the wind, as well as maintaining his relationship

---

23 During my PhD fieldwork I asked about specific reasons for disagreement. The interviewees said that the fear of offending the *sou afor* was often the prime reason. However, defying the *sou afor* was rare and only occurred if the defying clan wanted to build its reputation upon being fierce warriors and were ready to fight.

with his crew to ensure a successful voyage.<sup>24</sup> The *palou* would be judged by other *palou* upon reaching the designated destinations. Diplomatic negotiation is also a constellation of events that allowed the third party to explain his position in terms of his epistemological knowledge of the sea, the heaven and the islands environment so as to ensure that both sides understood the concerns and the likely solutions.

The challenge was for the negotiator to delicately choose a particular event in the vast history of the Mortlock region, which consists of many local clans and their specific histories. Naturally, the best position was to invoke the history of the clans to set the agenda. The next step was to relate the chain of historical events to put a sense of deep relation and appreciation between the opposing clans, and doing such could lead to restoration of peace. For example, the inter-island warfare that was instigated by the island of Ettal against Lukunor influenced the history of the Lower Mortlocks. It was an important historical event as it provided great lessons of diplomatic history. Lukunor was almost defeated and was about to be controlled by Ettal, but Ettal lost momentum. The event changed the dynamic of the clan system on Lukunor, whereupon a new sub-clan emerged as the new *makkal*<sup>25</sup> of the island. The lesson learned from this event was that peace was preferable to war.

The event also invited questions concerning the strategies used to end the conflict between the two opposing islands. The narrator would use his own intellectual dictionary of historical knowledge to convince the parties to restore peace, as no-one could win the conflict outright. Moreover, without a solution, the conflict could continue to play out in the future. At the same time, the opposing parties would weigh their decisions based on this history. Then questions would arise to validate

---

24 Destination is not so much where one ends the journey but the various points in the series of the journey. Inter-island journeys, like history, are circular and never stop completely at one particular point.

25 Makaan is the chief clan of each island. However, on certain islands *soupwel* is the alternative term.

or invalidate the narrative. If the questions could not be answered or a mistake was made, the unconvinced island could terminate the negotiation. However, the *sou afor* could maintain his stance and try to persuade both parties towards a positive settlement. If one of the parties rejected the *sou afor*'s final proposal unreasonably, it would mean public humiliation and disrespect of the *sou afor*'s reputation. His own clan would avenge his public humiliation by entering into its own conflict with the party that opposed the proposed solution.

### Why negotiate in good faith?

Negotiators firmly believe that the inner core of the Micronesian negotiation process is sacred, and requires painstaking attention to detail. It is a delicate undertaking, as it has its own special inner blessings (*maniman*) bestowed by the progenitors.<sup>26</sup> Negotiation at the outset should be conveyed with a salutation deep in traditions with humble words and respect so as to adhere to Mortlockese diplomatic principles. This is also to honour the spirit of the ancestors, by blessing the negotiation process. In the deep tradition of the Mortlockese historical past, it is customary for negotiators to initiate their topic by acknowledging the other clan's special position in the social hierarchy. This also conveys deep humility towards those witnessing the negotiation. Senior negotiators are required to make supporting remarks respecting their mutual understanding of history and social relations. Opening remarks lay the ground for the cross-fertilisation of good ideas so as to create the space for mutual engagement.

During the negotiation process, essential elements of cultures respecting the clan position in the social hierarchy were brought into the dialogue to establish context. In complex negotiations, the use of specific languages

---

26 *Maniman*, from the Mortlockese point of view, is a form of spiritual power. It can be used to either destroy or save a person, depending on the context of a given situation. This term is also used by Pohnpeians but with different spelling. See Rufino, 1993, p. 126; Petersen, 1993, p. 341.

only known to the inner circle of esteemed chiefs, orators, *itang* and selected individuals were also acknowledged. This exercise would minimise the intrusion of other ideas that could jeopardise the dialogue. The chief negotiator had the legitimate right to speak on behalf of his party at any time. Proposals for compensation would be framed in an appropriate and respectful manner. The reasons for a proposal should be given with details appropriate to the kind of offence committed by the guilty party. Violence could break out on the spot if compensation was not likely to be agreed upon. However, the role of the *itang* was to read into the languages of negotiation. He would alert his side if the negotiation was going to fall apart or, alternatively, give advice as to how to continue towards the next steps in the process. Compensation for big offences would be in the form of land giving, or forgoing a large part of a reef, by the offending party. This could lead to more than expectation (the ultimate aim) for the purpose of a long-lasting peace settlement. In some circumstances, alliances could be struck between the opposing parties, allowing the enlargement of the clan's influence in the Mortlock region.<sup>27</sup>

## Underestimation of the Islanders

Colonisers (*peshe siset*)<sup>28</sup> are always looked upon with suspicion by Mortlockese Micronesians. Suspicion is an element of survival that allowed the Islanders to keep an eye on intruders. Such suspicion was employed during the colonial era. However, a crucial question in this exchange is how did the *peshe siset* view the indigenous population? The historical literature speaks volumes about the treatment of Micronesians

---

27 Historically, long-lasting peace could be a result of intensive negotiation involving a reputable negotiator from a chiefly clan. This information was obtained from many oral sources growing up in the Mortlocks as well as during my PhD field research on many occasions.

28 The term *peshe siset* means 'salty feet from foreign seas'. I am using the term in reference to the colonists, who were not indigenous to Micronesia and yet asserted control of the islands without permission.

in terms of the use of derogatory language and labels such as ‘savage’, ‘primitive’ and ‘uncivilised’ in comparison to the outsiders’ own standing on their internally generated civilisations’ continuum.

To the Micronesians, the outsiders were arrogant and oblivious to the order of the indigenous world. This arrogance led the intruders to underestimate the strength of the Islanders. They treated the small population as too weak to mount a substantial resistance against colonial control. For example, small military detachments were usually deployed to guard the various colonial interests in Micronesia, only to find that their forces were insufficient in the face of serious local opposition.<sup>29</sup>

The colonisers mistook Micronesian silence as a sign of weakness. Micronesians used a variety of survival strategies against the colonial authorities, strategies that were learned from their past historical experiences. These included patience and passive resistance in the form of noncompliance and political manipulation. This is part of their history – to adapt to new circumstances based on past experience and observation as to what strategies to implement for effective protection under any given circumstance. Invariably, indirect resistance rather than direct confrontation against a foe armed with modern weaponry proved most effective. At other times, Micronesians gave the appearance of patiently accepting colonial demands while covertly continuing the traditional system of authority and interactions with each other to maintain their identities and cultural continuity.<sup>30</sup>

It is no accident that traditional diplomacy continues to be sought by local people as a preference to settle their disputes to this day. National politicians and negotiators are also using traditional diplomacy when

---

29 The Spanish and Germans military detachments in Pohnpei underestimated local resistance and had to send for reinforcements from their headquarters outside Micronesia (Hempenstall & Rutherford, 1984, pp. 109–110).

30 This is the major theme of my 2021 book, borne of a lifetime of atoll life and being privileged to be trusted as a clan historian/knowledge holder.

engaging with outsiders, using their deep knowledge of historical circumstances to enrich their negotiation skills in the modern world. Traditional diplomacy re-strengthened relationships between the leadership and the local communities. It is these historical continuities of cultural coherence and flexibility in light of external challenges which remains deeply embedded in the heart of Micronesian resilience (see D'Arcy, 2008, pp. 144–163). They are apparent throughout its long history of adjusting to seemingly overwhelming external forces. In this context, Mortlockese people do not perceive themselves as victims of imposed external forces in reference to, for example, colonisation and globalisation. Instead, they perceive themselves as challengers of these potential threats, who draw strength from diplomatic lessons of the historical past.

### **Negotiating independence via traditional diplomacy**

For centuries traditional diplomacy has been the mechanism of peace negotiations in the Mortlocks and elsewhere in the FSM. This approach was sidelined when outsiders arrived in the islands and imposed their own notions of 'peace settlements', which often involved violence. Micronesians continued to utilise traditional skills to deal with their changing circumstances of the Micronesians during the colonisation process (D'Arcy, 2008, p .2). Traditional diplomacy has been very successful in the management of outside influence so as to curtail the erosion of Micronesian culture. Although all four colonial powers in Micronesia attempted to impose their political and cultural values upon the indigenous population, they were not successful, because the Micronesian people deflected and prevented outsiders' values from taking roots in the islands. For example, the last colonial power, the United States (US), attempted to fully integrate the islands into the US political family. However, this was not to be, as the Micronesian leaders were traditionally connected to each other and understood previous tactics exercised by the US. As the Micronesian people do not have

physical tools to challenge the US, traditional diplomacy was the best political vehicle at their disposal to sustain their continuity.

The successive waves of external threat were met with local resistance against further incursion. Inherent in the decolonisation process was the implementation of strategies steeped in traditional negotiation tactics that the US negotiators did not fully understand. The US had to learn hard lessons, as it believed that acquisition of Micronesia was a matter of influencing the United Nations post World War II, when it began to administer the islands as part of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The TTPI was placed under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Security Council, allowing the US to use a long arm strategy to deny other global powers access to the territory because of its strategic value (as defined by the US) in the Asia-Pacific region.

Independence from colonial rule did not come easily for the Micronesians. However, their acute diplomatic skills attracted other powers, such as China, to assist the FSM towards independence. Autonomy and respect for the sovereignty of local entities have always been part of Micronesian diplomatic history, during and after colonisation. The underestimation of the Micronesians' diplomatic skills and poorly resourced colonial regimes left many communities to pursue their own priorities and objectives, which continued to revolve around the *ainang* (clans).

Micronesians' political astuteness and diplomatic skills have thwarted American attempts to retain political control over the FSM, even in the post-independence era. The FSM leaders ensured that their constitution reflects Micronesian diplomatic values. This was to ensure the inferior position of the Compact of Free Association with the US in relation to the FSM constitution. This tactic was promoted by the FSM leadership to set Micronesian priorities ahead of American interests. Continuity remains firm despite the intense changing circumstances in the external world. Traditional diplomacy has been the foundation upon which the Mortlockese Micronesians have ensured their future outlook in the face of attempts by outsiders to exert control.

FSM independence is premised on both the reassertion and restrengthening of internal connections. Traditional diplomacy allows the local and state governments to negotiate their affairs domestically,<sup>31</sup> while global relations are delegated to the national government. Traditional chiefs are protected by the constitution through the creation of a chamber of chiefs as the guardians and protectors of traditions.

## The clanship system

The *ainang* system in the Mortlocks centres on human relations across the region and the whole FSM nation. For example, the *kachaw* clan in Chuuk has its origin in Kosrae and Pohnpei (Uman et al., 1979). Likewise, some Yapese clans' origins extend to the islands of Chuuk and vice versa (Alkire, 1965, pp. 9–11). Today, the indigenous people continue their relationship with each other via the *ainang* network. Linguistic evidence also suggests a shared Micronesian connection through a common language called Chuukic, which encompasses the Mortlock Islands in the eastern part of the former Caroline Islands to the western end of the island chain in Palau (Rauchholz, 2011, pp. 54–55; Alkire, 1965, pp. 28–30). This is evidenced by the fact that people of many of the low-lying islands in Yap and Palau can converse with the people in the western part of Chuuk and the Mortlock region (Rauchholz, 2011, pp. 54–55; Alkire, 1965, pp. 28–30). As has already been demonstrated in discussing colonial rule, that common language involves common understanding of diplomatic concepts not evident to outsiders. Connection between Micronesians through this common language remains strong, and the constitution has provided opportunities for more interaction.<sup>32</sup> For example, any citizen of the FSM can travel and reside anywhere in the FSM, and most can migrate if they have kin connection in another state.

---

31 For an in-depth discussion, see Meller, 1985, pp. 261–281.

32 *The Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*, Preamble, 1979.

Micronesians are historically a highly mobile people, and they continue to transition and transplant themselves further afield. This is made possible by the global transportation system and diplomatic links with former colonial powers. For example, current estimates indicate that under the Compact, more than 20 per cent of the Micronesian population now resides outside the nation, particularly in the US (F. Nimea, personal communication, November 20, 2022). This new diaspora will continue to expand as a result of the inherent urge to travel to join their families now searching for opportunities outside Micronesia. A consequence of this process is the exportation of Micronesian ideologies to new spaces while Micronesians maintain a connection to their island homes (Marshall, 2004, pp. 144–145). The *ainang* system links dispersed clans and their members in the globalised world. As Captain Marar of the FSM Maritime police noted, ‘Micronesians are genuinely great navigators and negotiators; they continue to explore new stars to sail in the new sea of the globalised world with new experiences’ (D. Marar, personal communication, January 20, 2011). Despite the movement of Micronesian people beyond the horizon, the constitution asserts a Mortlockese contribution to FSM independence has been a result of their own intellectual prowess to systematically negotiate their own interests.<sup>33</sup> They continue to transform their communities, using their deep historical knowledge to adapt to the new world order. Traditional diplomacy remains the mode of perpetuation of their newly emerging communities both domestically and internationally.

## Conclusion

Traditional diplomacy endured throughout the colonial period despite the best efforts of colonial authorities to assert control over the Mortlocks and elsewhere in the FSM. As outsiders continue to impose their ideologies by political pressure, Mortlockese modes of negotiation

---

33 *The Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*, Article XIII, Section 4.

have survived rather than being overwhelmed. The Islanders have responded by recontextualising outside influence to enrich an emerging hybrid form of diplomacy. Mortlockese resilience can be traced back to the centuries of maintaining their doctrines of survival based on their understanding of their surrounding environment centred on the sea, the heavens and social setting. Modernity entered the Mortlocks region in the form of outsiders' intentions to overturn the traditional lifestyle. After experiencing outsiders' ideologies, it was clear to the Mortlockese population that traditional diplomacy should be the mode of resistance to ensure outsiders' ideologies remained subservient to the traditional doctrines, to allow their rich cultures to flourish and to provide enduring Micronesian continuity.

## References

- Alkire, W. (1965). *Lamotrek Atoll and inter-island socio-economic ties*. University of Illinois Press.
- Alkire, W. (1977). *An introduction to the peoples and cultures of Micronesia* (2nd ed.). Benjamin-Cummings Publishing Company.
- Alkire, W. (1999). Cultural ecology and ecological anthropology in Micronesia. In R. C. Kiste & M. Marshall (Eds.), *Micronesia in American anthropology: An assessment* (pp. 81–102). University of Hawai'i Press.
- Chappell, D. (2013). The post-contact period. In M. Rapaport (Ed.), *The Pacific Islands: Environment and society* (Rev. ed., pp. 138–146). University of Hawai'i Press.
- The Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia*. <https://www.fsmlaw.org/fsm/constitution/>

- D'Arcy, P. (2003). Cultural divisions and island environments since the time of Dumont d'Urville. *Journal of Pacific History*, 38(2), 217–236.
- D'Arcy, P. (2008). *The people of the sea: Environment, identity, and history of Oceania*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hanlon, D. (1989). Micronesia: Writing and rewriting the histories of a nonentity. *Pacific Studies*, 12(2), 1–21.
- Hempenstall, P., & Rutherford, N. (1984). *Protest and dissent in the colonial Pacific*. Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Kim, M. (2023). Weaving women stories: Restoring women and indigenous perspectives into Chuukese history. In R. T. Jones & M. K. Matsuda (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of the Pacific Ocean, vol.1: The Pacific Ocean to 1800* (pp. 91–106). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108539272>
- Lobban, C. S., & Scheffer, M. (1997). *Tropical Pacific Island environments*. University of Guam Press.
- Marshall, M. (2004). *Namoluk beyond the reef: The transformation of a Micronesian community*. Westview Press.
- Meller, N. (1985). *Constitutionalism in Micronesia*. Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University.
- Petersen, G. (1993). Kanengamah and Pohnpei's politics of concealment. *American Anthropologist*, 95(2), 334–352. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1993.95.2.02a00040>
- Puas, G. (2021). *The federated states of Micronesia's engagement with the outside world: Control, preservation and continuity*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/FSMEOW.2021>
- Rauchholz, M. (2011). Notes on clan histories and migration in Micronesia. *Pacific Asia Inquiry*, 2(1), 53–68.

- Rufino, M. (1993). *Ideological bases for power and leadership on Pohnpei* [PhD thesis]. University of Michigan.
- Uman, O., Saladier F., & Chipen, A. (1979). *Uruon Chuuk: A resource of oral legends, traditions, and history of Truk (vol. 1)*. ESEA Title IV Omnibus Program for Social Studies–Cultural Heritage, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

# The Keamu Accord, *kastom* and maritime boundaries

NIC MACLELLAN

In July 2009, delegations from the Government of Vanuatu and New Caledonia's independence movement Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front, or FLNKS) met on the island of Tanna, in Vanuatu's Tafea Province. Together with customary leaders, they signed the Keamu Accord, described as 'a solemn commitment between the Kanak people and the people of Vanuatu, that whatever the political and institutional future of New Caledonia, Matthew and Hunter Islands will always remain the property of the people of Vanuatu' (Union progressiste mélanésienne, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

Matthew and Hunter are uninhabited volcanic islands, located to the east of New Caledonia and south-east of Vanuatu. In the language of Aneityum island in Vanuatu, Matthew is known as Umaenupne or

---

1 Unless noted, all translations from French are by the author.

Uṁainupni (Tepahae & Lynch, 2001, p. 273). Hunter is known as Umaeneag or Uṁaineañ but is also called Leka by people from Vanuatu's south-eastern island of Futuna.

Both islands are disputed territory, claimed by the Republic of Vanuatu and also France, the administering colonial power in New Caledonia. Even before the joint Anglo-French condominium of New Hebrides gained independence as Vanuatu in 1980, there were questions over the administration and control of Matthew and Hunter. Since independence, repeated French assertions of sovereign rights over the waters around the islands have angered governments in Port Vila as well as the Kanak independence movement FLNKS, which supports Vanuatu's position in the territorial dispute.

For this reason, the signing of the Keamu Accord is a striking example of 'Oceanic diplomacy'. Salā George Carter, Greg Fry and Gordon Nanau describe Oceanic diplomacy as the 'distinctive diplomatic practices and principles which come out of the long history and diverse cultures of the Pacific Islands. These longstanding traditional systems are still important in the conduct of relations among tribes and clans within the postcolonial states of the Pacific' (Carter et al., 2021) – and between sovereign and colonised peoples. Oceanic diplomacy seeks to strengthen cultural relationships, in contrast to the transactional nature of much international diplomacy.

The 2009 Keamu Accord highlights the multilayered, often intersecting, processes that make up this Oceanic diplomacy in a modern context. It features: cultural connections across colonial boundaries between chiefs and clans; the use of oral history and legend to inform contemporary diplomatic relations; strengthened relations between political elites and local customary leaders; efforts by a national liberation movement to reinforce ties with a neighbouring independent state; and political diplomacy within a subregional organisation, the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). All of this is overlaid by the ongoing challenge from

the FLNKS and the Government of Vanuatu to the French Republic, which is currently involved in state-to-state negotiations with Vanuatu to resolve the long-running territorial dispute.

The resolution of disputes over maritime boundaries is important for the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent adopted by the Pacific Islands Forum in July 2022 (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2022). Pacific Island states are seeking to finalise the 45 inter-state maritime boundaries across the region, in line with the provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Beyond this, they were active in global negotiations for a new global treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas beyond national jurisdictions (BBNJ), adopted in June 2023. Both processes are complicated by the presence of colonial powers in the Islands region – United States, France, United Kingdom and New Zealand – that negotiate on behalf of their dependencies.

The territorial dispute over Matthew and Hunter Islands has obvious implications for the control and management of ocean resources, as nations seek to assert sovereign rights over their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and extend rights over the continental shelf under Article 76 of UNCLOS. Island states are seeking to increase revenues from foreign fishing fleets, as distant water fishing nations operate in their EEZs. The waters between New Caledonia and Vanuatu have long been the site of contested sovereignty involving these fishing fleets, with the French Navy seizing boats licensed to fish in Vanuatu waters (Maclellan, 2004; Makin, 2014). Beyond vast tuna resources, there is also growing interest from transnational corporations in the exploitation of deep-sea resources (oil and gas reserves, seabed minerals and marine biodiversity).

The need to finalise maritime boundaries is made more urgent by the effects of sea level rise that may lead to loss of territory in low-lying atoll nations (Bernsard et al., 2021; Strating & Wallis, 2021). In response, the Pacific Islands Forum adopted the Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise in August 2021 (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2021).

For France, with its far-flung colonial empire, UNCLOS provides significant economic and strategic advantages. In Europe, France has only 340,290 km<sup>2</sup> of EEZ, but its overseas collectivities add another 11 million km<sup>2</sup> worldwide – more than 7 million km<sup>2</sup> in the Pacific Ocean. Most of France's marine protected areas (MPAs) are located in its overseas dependencies: New Caledonia has 27,542 km<sup>2</sup> of ocean in MPAs, some 18% of the total MPA area claimed by France. In contrast, metropolitan France has just 45.9 km<sup>2</sup> or just 0.1% of the fully or highly protected areas it claims (Marine Conservation Institute, 2023).

Over the last decade, successive French presidents have paid more attention to oceans policy, extending military, environmental and maritime research programs across the oceans (Maclellan, 2018b). The long-running dispute over Matthew and Hunter should be seen as part of this broader strategic agenda over management and control of ocean resources in the Pacific (Maclellan, 2022b).

Before discussing the Keamu Accord, this chapter will briefly outline the historic dispute over Matthew and Hunter Islands, and then introduce the role of *kastom* (customary practice), legend and oral history in Melanesian societies. It will only touch on issues of international maritime law – interested readers can find details in the extensive legal literature (Girardeau & Gravelat, 2019; Heathcote, 2021; Mosses, 2019; Song & Mosses, 2018).

## **Disputes over the southern islands**

During most of the period of the joint Anglo-French condominium of New Hebrides (1904 to 1980), Matthew and Hunter were administered from Port Vila, rather than Nouméa (Song, Mosses & Girardeau, 2023). However, the United Kingdom government had little interest in the two islands and after two European businessmen sought to register a landholding on Matthew, a 1965 letter from Her Britannic Majesty's Resident Commissioner in Port Vila acknowledged: 'The islands of

Matthew and Hunter are considered by the French administrative authorities as being attached to New Caledonia. The British Government is content with this view.' (Wilkie, 1965).

The condominium – dubbed the 'pandemonium' by ni-Vanuatu leaders such as Walter Lini and Sethy Regenvanu – had overlapping colonial systems of law, governance and administration (Lini, 1980; Regenvanu, 2004). In the mid-1970s, as ni-Vanuatu nationalists created the Vanua'aku Pati and called for independence, French officials made renewed efforts to control Matthew and Hunter. In December 1975, French authorities deployed the minesweeper *La Bayonnaise* from New Caledonia to Hunter, where French troops installed a plaque that purported to assert sovereignty. In July 1976, reaffirmed by a decree in February 1978, France unilaterally declared a maritime zone off New Caledonia that included the disputed islands (Journal Officiel de la République Française, 1978).

After Vanuatu's independence, a delegation of ni-Vanuatu officials and customary elders travelled to Hunter aboard the *MV Euphrosyne II* on 9 March 1983, accompanied by Radio Vanuatu journalist Bob Makin (Makin, 2010). Chiefs from Vanuatu's southern islands – Philip Tepahae of Aneityum, Kanawi of South Tanna and Rafe of Futuna – placed *namale* (cycad) leaves, food and kava on the island, as a gift for the spirit Maorijikjik. The delegation raised the Vanuatu flag, sang the national anthem and removed the French plaque (Willie, 2021). Vanuatu issued postage stamps featuring the names Umaenupne and Umaeneag as part of its EEZ, and in later years the anniversary of this 1983 trip was commemorated as 'Matthew and Hunter Day' by participants (Makin, 2015).

Under Article 76 of UNCLOS, there are mechanisms to extend the continental shelf beyond the traditional 200-nautical-mile limit that gives sovereignty and control over marine resources around every islet, reef and archipelago. Parties can lodge a claim to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UN-CLCS) to extend boundaries beyond 200 nautical miles through recognition of

the extent of the undersea continental shelf. In May 2007, the French government attempted to extend New Caledonia's maritime boundaries 'on the basis of equitable geographical representation' through this mechanism (Government of the French Republic, 2007; UN-CLSC, 2009).

Angered by this manoeuvre, Vanuatu issued a series of submissions, protests and diplomatic notes. In response, France requested that the UN commission refrain from considering the portion of its submission relating to that sector of New Caledonia's continental shelf (de la Gorce, 2007).

Speaking before the UN General Assembly in 2011, decrying the foreign forces 'dividing peoples, families, cultures, and disconnecting the traditions of our ancestors,' Vanuatu Prime Minister Sato Kilman said:

Denying the right for a country to exercise its political freedom over its maritime territorial boundaries, preventing the indigenous people of a country to exercise their culture and traditional linkages with integral part of its lands, sovereign since time immemorial, remains one of the biggest crimes of our times. (Kilman, 2011)

Today, legislation in both Vanuatu<sup>2</sup> and New Caledonia<sup>3</sup> claims the two islands as part of their territory. In February 2018, delegations from France and Vanuatu met in Sydney for the first round of talks to

---

2 A 2010 parliamentary Act describing Vanuatu's maritime zone states that 'The territorial sea of Vanuatu comprises ... b) those areas of the sea having as their inner limits the low water line of the coasts of Matthew (Umaenupne) and Hunter (Leka) Islands enclosed by basepoints 1:249 for Matthew (Umaenupne) and basepoints 1:255 for Hunter (Leka) Islands and as their outer limits a line established seaward from those baselines every point of which is at a distance of 12 nautical miles.'

3 In Article 1 of the March 1999 Organic Law that introduced the 1998 Nouméa Accord into French law, the territory of New Caledonia includes 'the islands of Matthew and Fearn or Hunter'. See *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 1999, pp. 4197–4225.

resolve the outstanding dispute (Pacnews, 2018). A second round of negotiations took place in Brussels on 24 to 25 June 2019 (Pacnews, 2019a, 2019b). Further talks scheduled in 2020 and 2021 were delayed during the COVID-19 pandemic. During a state visit to Port Vila in July 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron pledged to resume these negotiations before year's end. MP for Tanna Johnny Koanapo responded that 'President Macron should declare that Matthew and Hunter are an integral part of Vanuatu and therefore should direct that processes are done by the two countries to finalise the delimitation of our maritime boundaries' (Maclellan, 2023). However, at time of writing in November 2025, no talks have recommenced and the dispute lingers on.

### **Kastom, chiefs and tradition**

Ni-Vanuatu anthropologist Anna Naupa has noted that, in independent Pacific states, 'indigenous knowledge has been effectively used in maritime boundary determination across the Pacific where island nations' UNCLOS-determined economic exclusion zones overlap' (Naupa, 2021, 2022). The Keamu Accord provides an example of the use of such knowledge from chiefs and elders, who act as guardians of custom (*kastom* in Bislama and *coutume* in French).

In both Vanuatu and New Caledonia, customary elders can be chosen by their peers as members of national councils of chiefs. These councils were created by governments as a mechanism to allow customary leaders to play a representative and advisory role to legislators, especially around issues of land, customary law and indigenous rights.

Recognising the importance of *kastom* in Vanuatu, governments have entrenched this role for customary authorities in both the national constitution and subsequent legislation (Forsyth, 2009). After independence in 1980, the new government under Prime Minister Walter Lini created the Malvatumauri (National Council of Chiefs) as

a formal advisory body of chiefs recognised in the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu.<sup>4</sup> Members of the council are elected by their fellow chiefs sitting in district councils of chiefs, including in the southern islands (Tepahae, 1997).

In New Caledonia, a key element of the 1998 Nouméa Accord – entrenched in legislation in March 1999 – was the creation of new political institutions, including three provincial assemblies, a congress and a multi-party government. In recognition of the culture and identity of Kanak people, this agreement also created the *Sénat coutumier* (Customary Senate), a 16-member national council for indigenous customary chiefs.<sup>5</sup> It serves as an advisory body that the government and congress must consult about legislation that affects Kanak identity (Chauchat, 2011, pp. 87–95). The *Sénat coutumier* is made up of two chiefs from each of the eight *aires coutumières* (customary regions) in New Caledonia: Iaaï, Drehu and Nengone in the Loyalty Islands, and Hoot Ma Whaap, Paicî-Cèmuhi, Ajië Aro, Xârâcùù, and Drubea-Kapumë on the main island of Grande Terre.

Some customary leaders have disputed whether these state-approved institutions actually respect the ‘traditional’ role of chiefs and clans. Disputes over the role of chiefly authority in a parliamentary system also mean these national councils have sometimes operated in tension with elected parliamentarians (Tabangcora, 2018; Tutugoro, 2020). Despite such tensions, there is extensive work to valorise indigenous traditional knowledge across many parts of Melanesia, recognising that the role of custom in contemporary life and especially around issues of land rights.

---

4 The powers of the Malvatumauri are detailed in Chapter 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu and in the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs Act No. 23 of 2006, and subsequent amendments in 2019.

5 The role and responsibilities of the *Sénat coutumier* are set out in Chapter 4, Articles 137–148 of the *Loi organique* No. 99–209 du 19 mars 1999 relative à la Nouvelle-Calédonie, *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 1999 (as amended).

Though disrupted by colonial dispossession, in parts of Melanesia there is a strong tradition of customary pathways that prescribe connections of alliance, reconciliation and ceremony. Such cultural pathways traverse mountains, rivers and oceans and can extend overseas across colonial boundaries. In New Caledonia, Emmanuel Kasarhérou notes that ‘the map of this network of relational *chemins* (pathways), which records the political history of the Kanak nation, exists only within the memory of oral tradition’ (Kasarhérou, 2004, p. 51).

Despite the cultural knowledge embedded in Kanak *coutume* (custom), there are often tensions with French law over ownership and sovereignty of littoral and maritime areas (Teulière-Preston, 2000). For this reason, the use of customary dialogue in the dispute over Matthew and Hunter provides an important example of the tension between oral history and the written archive, and between Oceanic diplomacy and international maritime law.

## **The Keamu Accord**

In the south-eastern part of the Vanuatu archipelago, Tafea Province includes the islands of Tanna, Aneityum, Futuna, Erromango and Aniwa. Aneityum is also known as Keamu, and anthropologists note that this name continues to be used on Futuna and the northern islands of New Caledonia (Talbot Wood, 2021). Vanuatu regards the southernmost islands Matthew/Umainupni and Hunter/Umainean as part of Tafea.

After the French government lodged its bid to extend New Caledonia’s continental shelf through the UN-CLCS in May 2007, the Government of Vanuatu met FLNKS representatives at a Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) summit the following year, at the opening of the new MSG Secretariat in Port Vila in May 2008. They asked then FLNKS spokesperson Victor Tutugoro to facilitate research on whether Kanak customary leaders had any cultural rights over Matthew and Hunter.

In an interview, Tutugoro described how this request was passed on to the Sénat coutumier in Nouméa for deliberation:

Through the MSG, we discussed what role the customary authorities might play, and what role the countries of the region such as Vanuatu and Fiji might play, to influence the discussion about this contested zone. The problem for us in New Caledonia was that the French State had unilaterally decided that the islands were part of New Caledonia.

We tried to research inside our country, through our customary leaders, what had happened before the arrival of the whites. So we, the FLNKS, began to work with our customary leaders, especially through the customary structures in the Loyalty Islands, in Ouvea, Lifou and Mare. Through this consultation, it was soon clear that not one, *not one*, of our customary groups had any rights over Matthew and Hunter.

At the same time, the Government of Vanuatu did similar work on its side. It appeared that there were cultural connections on Keamu, known as Aneityum, in the south, where customary authorities had made reference through stories. It was Jean-Marie Lényé, one of the presidents of Vanuatu, who affirmed that the customary links extended to Matthew and Hunter, and this was shown through genealogy and stories from people in Vanuatu.

The customary chiefs and President Lényé told us that Keamu Island was part of the pathway that the old people had travelled in the old days,

coming down from Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands and moving on through Vanuatu towards us for cultural exchanges, as well as with Australia, before the arrival of the whites.<sup>6</sup>

FLNKS representative Charles Wea attended the 2008 MSG summit and joined Victor Tutugoro to facilitate dialogue with Kanak customary chiefs:

At the time, there was discussion at the United Nations Commission on the definition of land and maritime boundaries. It was within this context that we began discussing the recognition by customary authorities over Matthew and Hunter. Victor and I were asked to see if the customary chiefs, especially from the Loyalty Islands – Lifou, Ouvea, Mare – had customary and cultural ties to Matthew and Hunter. So we approached the Sénat coutumier to ask if they had ties to the two islands. They came back to us and said ‘no’.

It was only Mare – not Matthew and Hunter – that had traditional ties to Tanna, at the time of the arrival of yam. The yam that we are growing in Kanaky came from Tanna to Mare: that’s why we call Mare the ‘cradle of the yam’. Long ago, when the [Yasur] volcano started to burn Tanna, people said ‘we have to save the yam’. So people ran away with the yams and landed in Mare.

People from Tanna and Aneityum told me legends and stories, how they used to go down to the

---

<sup>6</sup> V. Tutugoro, personal communication, 23 October 2021. Kanak independence politician Victor Tutugoro is from Nébeouba tribe in Ponérihouen, in New Caledonia’s Northern Province. He serves as president of the independence party Union progressiste en Mélanésie (UPM). Jean-Marie Lély Lenelgau (1932–2014) was a ni-Vanuatu politician and President of Vanuatu from 2 March 1994 to 2 March 1999.

islands [Matthew and Hunter] to fish. Our people from Mare and Lifou have stories with Tanna and Aneityum, but not with those two islands. So this history was very important for Vanuatu, as they had evidence to assist their claims over the two islands.<sup>7</sup>

Bob Makin, the Radio Vanuatu journalist who joined the 1983 trip to claim the islands, has continued to report on Tafea's cultural connections with Matthew and Hunter:

All the southern islands have stories about the two outliers which involve the spirit of the south, Maorijikjik. Custom chiefs who accompanied the first post-Independence voyage to the two southern active volcanoes were agreed about their significance in legend. (Makin, 2013)

There are a range of oral legends across Vanuatu that describe the arrival of the god Maui Tikitiki in Efate and the southern islands of Vanuatu, documented in stories collected since the 19th century by linguists, geographers and anthropologists (Lindstrom, 2021; Taonui, 2006) and contemporary researchers from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (Song et al., 2023, pp. 6–7). These stories show linguistic connections to wider Oceanic traditions around Maui and the 'fishing up' of volcanic islands (Nunn, 2003). Makin wrote about this cultural history in relation to the southern islands:

Whilst Matthew and Hunter have had little permanent cultures of residence from Vanuatu, they are at the centre of Vanuatu legends

---

7 C. Wea, personal communication, 5 March 2022. Charles Wea was born in Gossanah tribe in the north of Iaäi (Ouvea), in New Caledonia's Loyalty Islands Province. A member of the Parti de Libération Kanak (Palika), he was formerly FLNKS representative in Australia.

describing the arrival of the great god Mautikitiki in the islands of Tafea. These islands were visited by flotillas of southern islands' canoes for fishing purposes over centuries, traveling between the southern (Tafean) volcanic islands and the rocky pyramids of stone which constitute the active volcanoes of Matthew and Hunter, on our side of the New Hebrides Trench. The canoeists would measure their progress by way of the underwater volcanoes which also provided quantities of fish. (Makin, 2015)

### **Signing the accord**

Based on this oral history, the FLNKS and Vanuatu government moved to codify these findings through the Keamu Accord.

On 4 April 2009, the members of the Sénat coutumier in New Caledonia issued a declaration stating: 'We recognise through custom the historical fact that Matthew and Hunter Islands belong in *kastom* to the chieftainships of Tanna.' Their declaration highlighted the 'lasting relations between the Loyalty Islands Province and the Tafea Province ... to allow the free movement of people and trade to prosper between the two countries, without ulterior motives' ('L'affaire Matthew-Hunter vue par les coutumiers', 2009).

Charles Wea stresses that it was important customary leaders and not politicians determined the evidence of cultural links:

We took that case straight to the Sénat coutumier, and they took it out to the *aires coutumières* [customary regions]. We didn't take it to the FLNKS Political Bureau at that time, as it was a custom matter. We just facilitated communication. When

the Senate gave its answer that the Kanak people don't have a relationship with the two islands, that's when we brought the issue inside the BP [Bureau politique]. So the FLNKS only supported this accord because of the decision of the Senate.<sup>8</sup>

The information was passed to Port Vila and the Vanuatu government, led by then Prime Minister Edward Natapei, proposed it be formalised at a ceremony on Tanna. The opportunity came during Tafea-Kanaky festival involving customary leaders from the two countries (Tafea has maintained close ties with New Caledonia as part of a Vanuatu government policy since 2008, which promotes the twinning of each province with a neighbouring MSG country).

After the proposed accord was taken to Keamu/Aneityum for approval by customary authorities, the formal signing then took place on 21 July 2009, during the cultural festival at Lenakel (the main town on Tanna, which serves as the provincial capital for Tafea Province). The Vanuatu delegation was led by Prime Minister Edward Natapei and Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade Joe Natuman, together with representatives of the Malvatumauri. Both leaders were born in the southern islands: Natapei on the isolated south-eastern island of Futuna, while Natuman represented Tanna Constituency in the Vanuatu Parliament.<sup>9</sup>

The ni-Vanuatu leaders were joined in Lenakel by FLNKS representatives Victor Tutugoro and Charles Wea, Sénat coutumier president Ambroise

---

8 C. Wea, personal communication, 5 March 2022. The FLNKS Bureau politique is an executive made up of representatives of each of the political parties in the independence coalition.

9 Edward Nipake Natapei Tuta Fanua'araki (1954–2015) twice served as prime minister of Vanuatu, between 2001 and 2004 and again from 2008 to 2010. Appointed foreign minister on 19 June 2009, Joe Natuman later served as prime minister in 2014 to 2015 and took over the leadership of the Vanua'aku Pati after Natapei's death.

Doumaï and other Kanak customary elders. Years later, Tutugoro recalled the day with pride:

It was a great event. On the day, there was a customary ceremony and then the signing of the document. There was a formal exchange of customary gifts between the Sénat coutumier of New Caledonia and the Malvatumauri, which is the Vanuatu council of chiefs. This customary exchange showed that Kanak chiefs renounced any claims, of any sort, over Matthew and Hunter, and that the sovereignty of the islands remained with the customary authorities of Vanuatu, especially from Tanna and the province of Tafea.<sup>10</sup>

Announcing the agreement, the two delegations stated:

The people of the Republic of Vanuatu, through its Prime Minister Edward Natapei, and the Kanak people, through the FLNKS spokesperson Victor Tutugoro, have co-signed an agreement known as the 'Keamu Accord', which recognises the membership of Matthew and Hunter Islands in the Republic of Vanuatu.

Tutugoro reaffirmed, in line with the Sénat coutumier declaration, that 'the indigenous [Kanak] people have no history or traditions on these islands.'<sup>11</sup>

In 2009, Tutugoro was president of the independence party Union progressiste mélanésienne (UPM) – since renamed <sup>12</sup> – and on 29 July,

---

10 V. Tutugoro, personal communication, 23 October 2021.

11 V. Tutugoro, personal communication, February 2010. See also Maclellan, 2010a, pp. 16–18.

12 Years after the signing of the Keamu Accord, the UPM party changed its name from 'Union progressiste mélanésienne' to 'Union progressiste en Mélanésie'. For continuity and references, this chapter uses the name from the 2000s.

UPM issued a statement affirming that the Keamu Accord is 'a solemn commitment between the Kanak people and the people of Vanuatu, that whatever the political and institutional future of New Caledonia, Matthew and Hunter Islands will always remain the property of the people of Vanuatu' (UPM, 2009).

The Keamu Accord reinforced Vanuatu's policy on maritime boundaries, and two weeks later, on 10 August, the Natapei government made a further submission to the UN-CLCS:

The Republic of Vanuatu recognises that the islands of Matthew (Umaenupne) and Hunter (Leka) of the Republic of Vanuatu, and the continental margin which extends from them, are land territory and maritime regions over which there is a longstanding dispute with the Government of the French Republic and this dispute has not been settled in accordance with international law to date. (Government of Vanuatu, 2009, p. 2)

At this time, the rotating chair of the *Sénat coutumier* was held by Ambroise Doumaï, the high chief of Mouli district on Iaaï (Ouvea). Doumaï stressed that the Senate's declaration was not part of the state-to-state negotiations over Matthew and Hunter:

That the Vanuatu government uses it to support its claim, that is their right. For the FLNKS to use it, is also their right. But we remain at the customary level and we say that the diplomatic issue at stake does not concern the Kanak. We lose nothing [in the state-to-state negotiations] since these islands are not ours. ('L'affaire Matthew-Hunter vue par les coutumiers', 2009)

Charles Wea, also born on Iaaï, reaffirms the political and cultural value of the process:

They all said that the accord had no legal value. But it was more a customary agreement, an act of traditional recognition. The signing of the paper during the Tafea-Kanaky festival gave it a more cultural dimension, to say the Kanak people and the Vanuatu people have a long cultural relationship. But it was important for us that the chiefs and customary leaders from the islands said that Matthew and Hunter belong to Vanuatu, not Kanaky.<sup>13</sup>

For the *Sénat coutumier*, the declaration on Matthew and Hunter was part of a broader program of acknowledging other pre-colonial connections, including links between the Loyalty Islands and Uvea, Alo and Sigave (the three kingdoms that make up the French overseas territory of Wallis and Futuna).

On 25 July, just days after the signing of the Keamu Accord, the *Sénat coutumier* also signed an agreement with customary leaders from Wallis and Futuna, at a ceremony at the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre in Nouméa. This declaration between New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna highlights ‘customary and Christian values, elements at the heart of tolerance, stability and social peace’. The customary pathways to the three Polynesian kingdoms in Wallis and Futuna pass through New Caledonia’s northern town of Pouébo and the island of Iaaï, so the agreement sets out the objective ‘to re-establish the historic links ruptured by colonisation, which pass from the Kanak side through the chieftainships of Iaaï and Pouébo’ (*‘L’affaire Matthew-Hunter vue par les coutumiers’*, 2009).

---

13 C. Wea, personal communication, 5 March 2022.

Charles Wea says that these historic connections have relevance today in Kanak custom on his home island:

Ouvea was the gateway for people arriving from the Pacific, like the story of Kaukelo from the kingdom of Wallis. He ran away and they told him, you take the canoe and go to the ocean. Kaukelo took a large canoe and they went to Samoa, to Tonga and then they end up in Ouvea. That's why today, in Ouvea, when they make ceremonies, people say 'the Tonga clan' or 'the Samoa clan'. That's because every time he stopped on the way to Ouvea, in Tonga or Samoa, Kaukelo picked up one or two people. That's the story, and that's why some people in Ouvea speak in Faga Uvea.<sup>14</sup>

## Keamu and regional relations

The use of cultural reconciliation, dialogue and pan-Melanesia diplomacy has been a central feature of political life in New Caledonia, especially after *les événements* – the period of armed conflict that divided the community between 1984 and 1988 (Maclellan 2005; 2019). For this reason, the adoption of the Keamu Accord in 2009 had important diplomatic implications, strengthening the existing relationship between the FLNKS and Vanuatu at a time of significant tensions within the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).<sup>15</sup>

MSG leaders gathered in Port Vila for a special leaders' retreat on 10 July 2009, just two weeks before the Keamu signing ceremony. At this retreat, FLNKS and ni-Vanuatu leaders worked together in a debate over the Bainimarama regime's abrogation of the 1997 Fiji constitution and subsequent suspension from the Pacific Islands Forum. Seeking 'Pacific

---

<sup>14</sup> C. Wea, personal communication, 5 March 2022.

<sup>15</sup> The FLNKS, rather than the Government of New Caledonia, is a full member of the MSG, which also includes the independent nation states of Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Solomon Islands.

Way' resolution of this dispute, the final MSG communiqué 'called on members of the Pacific Islands Forum to engage in open and constructive dialogue with Fiji', utilising 'genuine dialogue and reconciliation consistent with Melanesian values and traditional practices' (MSG, 2009, p. 2). The close alliance between the FLNKS and Vanuatu within the MSG was soon enhanced by Keamu, a process 'consistent with Melanesian values and traditional practices'!

In New Caledonia, the Keamu Accord also sharpened debate between the FLNKS, the French State and anti-independence politicians, especially because the signing came just days before the French government hosted the third France-Oceania Summit, held in Nouméa on 31 July 2009 (Government of the French Republic, 2009).

French loyalists such as Senator Simon Loueckhote, New Caledonia's representative in the French Senate in Paris, denounced the agreement (Loueckhote, 2009). Conservative politician Didier Leroux said the accord was 'without value under international law', describing it as 'a gross provocation' just days before the opening of the France-Oceania Summit ('Tempête autour des deux îlots', 2009). In an interview, Tutugoro recalled that 'the French were very angry about the agreement':

The French High Commissioner reproached me several times that we were undercutting international negotiations over areas that could have significant resources, such as oil deposits or undersea minerals. He was joined in this criticism by all the local political class, the anti-independence people, and even some right-wing Kanak such as Simon Loueckhote. Invariably, we'd reply to these people: we are acting according to law – these islands don't belong to us, and the agreement is between brothers of the same culture. We won't go back on this: if tomorrow

they discover great wealth around the islands,  
then it belongs to them.<sup>16</sup>

The French state hoped to use the 2009 France-Oceania Summit to lobby Island leaders for an upgrade of the status of New Caledonia and French Polynesia within the Pacific Islands Forum from observer to full membership (a goal finally achieved in 2016). In turn, Tutugoro's UPM party stressed that France's refusal to act on Matthew and Hunter damaged its regional relations:

France must demonstrate its influence in the face of economic, political and cultural expansion into the area by Australia, New Zealand and above all China, which is nibbling away at international markets and which, little by little, is establishing its influence in the Pacific area (UPM, 2009).

In the years since the Keamu Accord signing, the issue of Matthew and Hunter has repeatedly surfaced in debates within New Caledonia.

In April 2014, the Government of New Caledonia announced creation of Le Parc naturel de la mer de Corail (the Coral Sea Nature Park). The purported boundaries of the park include Matthew and Hunter, reinvigorating the dispute with Vanuatu (Girardeau & Gravelat, 2019, pp. 66–68; Government of New Caledonia, 2014).

New Caledonia's largest independence party, Union Calédonienne, issued a formal policy statement in late 2017, which included a series of policies to strengthen ties with the region. These included an explicit commitment that 'the situation of Matthew and Hunter Islands will be resolved in accordance with the agreement with Vanuatu signed on behalf of FLNKS' (Union Calédonienne, 2017, p. 16).

---

16 V. Tutugoro, personal communication, 23 October 2021.

In February 2018, in preparation for a referendum on self-determination that November, the FLNKS held a congress at Arama tribe near the northern town of Poum. Among many pressing issues, the congress took time to pass a resolution reiterating its position that ‘the islands of Matthew and Hunter form part of the natural heritage of the Republic of Vanuatu’ (FLNKS, 2018; Maclellan, 2018a).

A year later, after a meeting of its political bureau on 5 March 2019, the FLNKS committed to ‘making its voice heard on the subject in future discussions relating to the end of the Nouméa Accord process and, in particular, regarding the delimitation of Kanaky-New Caledonia’s maritime boundaries’ (FLNKS, 2019). In response, the three New Caledonian representatives in the French Parliament – Senator Gérard Poadja and deputies Philippe Gomès and Philippe Dunoyer – issued a statement that Matthew and Hunter ‘form an integral part of the territory of New Caledonia and also the Coral Sea Nature Park’ (Senate, 2019). The three politicians, all members of the anti-independence Calédonie ensemble party, argued that only the French state and not the Government of New Caledonia had the legal authority to negotiate on issues of sovereign rights.

In July 2021, Louis Mapou was appointed as the President of New Caledonia, the first time in nearly 40 years that a pro-independence Kanak politician had led the collegial government. In his first major speech outlining the government’s program, Mapou stressed the importance of the ‘regional integration’ of New Caledonia, and noted that ‘within the framework of regional cooperation, we will propose the implementation establishment of a ‘Peace Park’ on Matthew and Hunter Islands, which could be managed in consultation with Vanuatu’ (Government of New Caledonia, 2021).

The Sénat coutumier has ensured that the presidents of the eight regional customary councils are included on the management committee of

this marine protected area. A 10-year moratorium on exploration and exploitation of marine resources has been proposed:

to allow the continuation of the work carried out by the government with the Sénat coutumier on the Kanak cultural vision of the ocean and its protection, so that the cultural dimension of this maritime space can be taken into account in the management of the park. (Government of New Caledonia, 2023)

## Conclusion

The Keamu Accord is, in essence, a cultural agreement among Melanesian peoples. But its signing takes on greater importance in the context of France's role as a colonial power in the Pacific and the legal impact of decolonisation processes in international law – which is historic for New Hebrides/Vanuatu but ongoing in Kanaky-New Caledonia.

Today, the future of Matthew and Hunter is being fought out in complex and contested state-to-state negotiations between France and Vanuatu (Song & Mosses, 2018). As boundary negotiations restart between the two countries, international lawyers have begun to assess the ways that the Keamu Accord may affect the ongoing territorial dispute, based on the legal impact of decolonisation processes in international law.

While both New Hebrides and New Caledonia were listed on the 1946 UN list of non-self-governing territories (NSGTs), France refused to meet its decolonisation obligations for many decades. However, following UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 41/41A of 2 December 1986, New Caledonia was re-listed on the United Nations NSGT list. Under Article 73e of the UN Charter, France – as the administering power – has responsibilities to report to the UN Special Committee on Decolonization about the progress of the decolonisation

process, a responsibility it resisted between 1947 and 2004 (Regnault, 2013).

Under a series of international declarations, treaties and UNGA resolutions, France has obligations to protect the economic, social, cultural and political rights of colonised and indigenous peoples living in its NSGTs. Such rights are re-affirmed in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and repeated UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions. For example, a 2012 UNGA resolution:

calls upon the Administering Powers to ensure that the exploitation of the marine and other natural resources in the Non-Self-Governing Territories under their administration is not in violation of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and does not adversely affect the interests of the peoples of those Territories' (UN, 2012). The UN Special Committee on Decolonisation has reaffirmed that 'natural resources are the heritage of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, including the indigenous populations. (UN, 2021)

Assessing the ongoing Matthew-Hunter dispute, international lawyer Sarah Heathcote argues that 'on the evidence available today, France (on behalf of New Caledonia), rather than Vanuatu, has a stronger claim to sovereignty over the islands' (Heathcote, 2021, p. 671). However, she also notes the political significance of the Kéamu Accord, given France's role as a colonial power in New Caledonia:

Both the Kéamu Accord and the Nouméa Accord ... raise interesting issues as to their status under international law given that New Caledonia is a NSGT with a right to self-determination, as well as the increasing recognition of indigenous rights

over land, as articulated in Article 26 of the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 26 affirms the fundamental connection between indigenous peoples and the lands that they have traditionally used or occupied. (Heathcote, 2021, p. 673, ellipsis added)

Given that France is a signatory to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Heathcote concludes: ‘arguably in relation to Hunter and Matthew, as a matter of international law, France should take into account the FLNKS’ views – including notably, that expressed in the Keamu Accord’ (Heathcote, 2021, p. 673).

In November 2011, then UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples James Anaya formally wrote to the French government, raising the alleged denial by France for indigenous peoples of Vanuatu to access Matthew and Hunter ‘which are sites of religious and cultural significance to them, for the purposes of carrying out ceremonies’ (Anaya, 2011). In reply, France affirmed that Matthew and Hunter Islands are under French sovereignty and control ‘and that the Government is unaware of religious or cultural practices affiliated with the islands.

Examining the implications for the France–Vanuatu dispute of International Court of Justice rulings on the Chagos Islands and Western Sahara, ni-Vanuatu legal scholar Morsen Mosses suggests that ‘although France’s claims based on effective occupation are likely to override Vanuatu’s claims related, among other things, to custom, culture and traditions, the right to self-determination, as a rule of customary international law, will likely prevail’ (Mosses, 2019, p. 475).

For this reason, relationships across colonial boundaries – over time and space – have ongoing implications for the peoples of Melanesia. As negotiations continue between France and Vanuatu over the fate of the islands, the Melanesian nation will continue to value the important

declaration from the indigenous people of New Caledonia. The Keamu Accord provides an important model of multilayered Oceanic diplomacy in the 21st century.

## Acknowledgements

This chapter draws on the author's reporting as a correspondent for *Islands Business* magazine (Fiji), with thanks to editors Samantha Magick, Samisoni Pareti and the late Laisa Taga. It is an edited version of a 2022 Department of Pacific Affairs discussion paper published by The Australian National University (see Maclellan, 2022a). Thanks are due to many people from Vanuatu and New Caledonia for interviews and information, including Victor Tutugoro, Charles Wea, Anthony Tutugoro, Sarimin Jacques Boengkih, Mathias Chauchat, Ralph Regenvanu, Dan McGarry and Anna Naupa. Kathryn Skorkiewicz, Greg Fry, Sarah Heathcote, three peer reviewers and colleagues from the Oceanic Diplomacy network provided valuable comments, though bear no responsibility for my conclusions.

## References

- Anaya, J. (2011). *Lettre concernant le refus de la France de permettre aux populations autochtones de la République de Vanuatu d'accéder aux îles d'Umaenupne et d'Umaenea (sic), sous souveraineté française* [Letter concerning France's refusal to allow the indigenous peoples of the Republic of Vanuatu access to Umaenupne and Umaeneag islands, under French sovereignty]. UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Case no. FRA 4/2011 (Allegation letter: AL 29 November 2011; State reply: 30 January 2012). <https://unsr.jamesanaya.org/?p=746>

- Bernsard, L., Petterson, M., Schofield, C., & Kaye, S. (2021). Securing the limits of large ocean states in the Pacific: Defining baselines limits and boundaries amidst changing coastlines and sea level rise. *Geosciences*, 11, 394. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3263/11/9/394>
- Carter, G., Fry, G., & Nanau, G. (2021). *Oceanic diplomacy: An introduction* (DPA In Brief, 2021/23). Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/T84Y-DG87>
- Chauchat, M. (2011). *Les institutions en Nouvelle-Calédonie* [New Caledonia's political institutions]. Centre de documentation pédagogique de Nouvelle-Calédonie.
- de la Gorce, X. (2007, July 18). Extension of the continental shelf in New Caledonia/disputed by Vanuatu. Letter from France's Secretary-General of the Sea Xavier de la Gorce to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, Paris. [https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/fra07/fra\\_letter\\_july2007\\_english.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/fra07/fra_letter_july2007_english.pdf)
- Forsyth, M. (2009). *A bird that flies with two wings: Kastom and state justice systems in Vanuatu*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/BFTW.09.2009>
- Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste. (2018, February 3–4). *Motion Relations Internationales, 36th Congrès du FLNKS 'Yet Tim Men Ta Yabwat'* [Motion on international relations, 36th FLNKS Congress].
- Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste. Communiqué de presse (2019, March 7). Media release, FLNKS Bureau politique.
- Girardeau, G., & Gravelat, C. (2019). *La mise en œuvre des compétences sur la ZEE et le plateau continental des outre-mer : des ambiguïtés de la CDUNM à la complexité des statuts*. [The operationalisation of powers over the EEZ and continental shelf of the French overseas

territories: From the ambiguities of the CDUNM to the complexity of the legal statutes], *Revue du droit de la mer*, 45–72.

Government of the French Republic. (2007, May). The French continental shelf: Partial submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, pursuant to Article 76, paragraph 8 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in respect of areas of French Guiana and New Caledonia. [https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/submission\\_fra.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/submission_fra.htm)

Government of the French Republic. (2009, July 31). *Final declaration* [Speech]. Third France-Oceania Summit, Nouméa.

Government of New Caledonia. (2014, April 23). *Arrête créant le Parc naturel de mer de Corail* [Decree creating the Coral Sea Nature Park], No. 2014–1063 GNC. [https://mobi-juridoc.gouv.nc/juridoc/jdtextes.nsf/2E3825EBA9C376D94B258251007D2AF1/\\$file/Arrete\\_2014-1063\\_du\\_23-04-2014\\_ChG\\_06-11-2024.pdf?openement](https://mobi-juridoc.gouv.nc/juridoc/jdtextes.nsf/2E3825EBA9C376D94B258251007D2AF1/$file/Arrete_2014-1063_du_23-04-2014_ChG_06-11-2024.pdf?openement)

Government of New Caledonia. (2021, November 25). *Déclaration de politique générale, Louis Mapou, Président du 17e gouvernement de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* [General policy statement, Louis Mapou, President of the 17th Government of New Caledonia]. Tjibaou Cultural Centre, Nouméa. [https://gouv.nc/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2021.11.25\\_dpg\\_louis\\_mapou\\_version\\_revisee.pdf](https://gouv.nc/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2021.11.25_dpg_louis_mapou_version_revisee.pdf)

Government of New Caledonia. (2023, June 7). *Projet de loi du pays portant moratoire sur l'exploration et l'exploitation des ressources minérales au sein de l'espace maritime de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, report no. 38/GNC du 7.06.2023 [Draft law on a moratorium of the exploration and exploitation of mineral resources within the maritime zone of New Caledonia, report No. 38/GNC]. <https://www.congres.nc/textes/projet-de-loi-du-pays-portant-moratoire-sur-lexploration-et-lexploitation-des-ressources-minerales-au-sein-de-lespace-maritime-de-la-nouvelle-caledonie-rapport-n-38-g/>

Government of Vanuatu. (2009, August 10). Preliminary information submitted by the Republic of Vanuatu to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. [https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/preliminary/vut\\_2009\\_preliminaryinfo.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/preliminary/vut_2009_preliminaryinfo.pdf)

Heathcote, S. (2021). Secession, self-determination and territorial disagreements: Sovereignty claims in the contemporary South Pacific. *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 34(3), 653–680. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156521000236>

Journal Officiel de la République Française. (1978). Decree no. 78–142 of 3 February 1978 establishing, pursuant to the Law of 16 July 1976, an economic zone off the coasts of the territory of New Caledonia and dependencies. *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, February 11.

Journal Officiel de la République Française. (1999). Article 1, Loi no 99–209 du 19 mars 1999 organique relative à la Nouvelle-Calédonie [Article 1, Organic Law No. 99–209 of 19 March 1999 relating to New Caledonia]. *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, March 21, 4197–4225.

Kasarhérou, E. (Ed.). (2004). *Guide Mwakaa – The pathways of Kanak tradition*. Centre Culturel Jean-Marie Tjibaou.

Kilman, S. (2011, September 24). *Statement by the Right Honourable Meltek Sato Kilman Liuvuanu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu*, 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York. <https://gadebate.un.org/en/66/vanuatu>

L'affaire Matthew-Hunter vue par les coutumiers [The Matthew-Hunter dispute as seen by customary chiefs]. (2009, July 30). *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*. <https://www.lnc.nc/article/societe/l-affaire-matthew-hunter-vue-par-les-coutumiers>

- Lindstrom, L. (2021). *Tanna times: Islanders in the world*. University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10125/67674>
- Lini, W. (1980). *Beyond pandemonium: From the New Hebrides to Vanuatu*. Asia Pacific Books.
- Loueckhote, S. Communiqué de presse (2009, July 28). Media release by Senator Simon Loueckhote.
- Maclellan, N. (2004, December 7). Fishing boat highlights maritime boundary dispute. *Pacific Beat* [Radio program]. ABC Radio Australia.
- Maclellan, N. (2005). *Conflict and reconciliation in New Caledonia: Building the Mwâ Kâ*. (SSGM Discussion Paper, 2005/1). Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/5f20007d7e670>
- Maclellan, N. (2010a, April). Islands conflict: Port Vila dispute spotlights border battle with French. *Islands Business*.
- Maclellan, N. (2010b, December). Searching the continental shelf: Australia and France explore ocean resources. *Islands Business*, 30–31.
- Maclellan, N. (2015). Pacific diplomacy and decolonisation in the 21st century. In Fry, G., & Tarte, S. (Eds.), *The new Pacific diplomacy* (pp. 263–281). ANUPress. <https://doi.org/10.22459/NPD.12.2015.21>
- Maclellan, N. (2018a, March 7). At the dawn of a new day: FLNKS congress calls for 'full sovereignty.' *Islands Business online*. <https://islandsbusiness.com/2018/2018-march/at-the-dawn-of-a-new-day-full-story/>
- Maclellan, N. (2018b). France and the Blue Pacific. *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, 5(3), 426–441. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.228>
- Maclellan, N. (2019, May 10). Thirty years on, a spirit of reconciliation in New Caledonia. *Inside Story*. <https://insidestory.org.au/thirty-years-on-a-spirit-of-reconciliation-in-new-caledonia/>

- Maclellan, N. (2022a). *Oceanic diplomacy: The Kéamu Accord, kastom and maritime boundaries* (DPA Discussion Paper, 2022/4). Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/9TZP-TN85>
- Maclellan, N. (2022b, February). France, the oceans and seabed mining. *Islands Business*, 32–33. <https://islandsbusiness.com/2022/france-the-oceans-and-seabed-mining/>
- Maclellan, N. (2023, July 27). Vanuatu MP says Macron should act on Matthew and Hunter. *Islands Business* online. <https://islandsbusiness.com/news-break/vanuatu-mp-says-macron-should-act-on-matthew-and-hunter/>
- Makin, B. (2010, June). Why Matthew and Hunter are ours: Vanuatu fights for the two islands. *Islands Business*.
- Makin, B. (2013, March 11). Vanuatu's custom claim to Matthew and Hunter Islands. *Vanuatu Daily Post*.
- Makin, B. (2014, July 10). France may have to pay damages to Vanuatu-flagged Chinese vessel. *Vanuatu Daily Post*. [https://www.dailypost.vu/news/france-may-have-to-pay-damages-to-vanuatu-flagged-chinese-fishing-vessel/article\\_674be93a-f9a6-59e7-82fb-637a6fa82a1b.html](https://www.dailypost.vu/news/france-may-have-to-pay-damages-to-vanuatu-flagged-chinese-fishing-vessel/article_674be93a-f9a6-59e7-82fb-637a6fa82a1b.html)
- Makin, B. (2015, March 12). Matthew and Hunter Day. *Vanuatu Daily Post*. [https://www.dailypost.vu/news/matthew-and-hunter-day/article\\_253d5ec4-47b1-5a5c-ac54-69a739cee733.html](https://www.dailypost.vu/news/matthew-and-hunter-day/article_253d5ec4-47b1-5a5c-ac54-69a739cee733.html)
- Melanesian Spearhead Group. (2009, July 10). *Special Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) leaders retreat* [Joint communiqué].
- Mosses, M. (2019). Revisiting the Matthew and Hunter Islands dispute in light of the recent Chagos advisory opinion and some other relevant cases: An evaluation of Vanuatu's claims relating to the right to self-determination, territorial integrity, unlawful occupation and state responsibility under international law. *Netherlands International Law Review*, 66, 475–506.

- Marine Conservation Institute. (2023). France. In *The marine protection atlas*. <https://mpatlas.org/countries/FRA/>
- Naupa, A. (2021, September 17). Safeguarding Pacific Island seas starts with indigenous knowledge. *The Interpreter*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/safeguarding-pacific-island-seas-starts-indigenous-knowledge>
- Naupa, A. (2022, May 19). *Sealed with kava and betel nut: Lessons in Oceanic diplomacy from the Mota Lava Treaty*. (DPA In Brief, 2022/11). Australian National University. <https://www.doi.org/10.25911/2SGH-D402>
- Nunn, P. D. (2003). Fished up or thrown down: The geography of Pacific Island origin myths. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 93(2), 350–364. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8306.9302006>
- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. (2021, August 6). *Declaration on preserving maritime zones in the face of climate change-related sea-level rise*. Pacific Islands Forum, Suva. <https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/2021%20Declaration%20on%20Preserving%20Maritime%20Zones%20in%20the%20face%20of%20Climate%20Change-related%20Sea-level%20rise.pdf>
- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. (2022, July). *2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific continent*. Pacific Islands Forum, Suva. <https://forumsec.org/2050>
- Pacnews. (2018, February 18). Maritime boundary talks successful: Vanuatu PM.
- Pacnews. (2019a, March 7). Vanuatu presses France for talks over Matthew and Hunter.
- Pacnews. (2019b, July 2). Vanuatu and France negotiate maritime boundaries.
- Regenvanu, S. J. (2004). *Laef blong mi: From village to nation*. Institute of Pacific Studies.

- Regnault, J.-M. (2013). *L'ONU, la France et les décolonisations tardives: l'exemple des terres françaises d'Océanie* [The UN, France and delayed decolonisation: The example of French dependencies in Oceania]. Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille.
- Senate. (2019, March 9). *Matthew and Hunter: une partie du territoire de la Nouvelle-Calédonie et de la République* [Matthew and Hunter: Part of the territory of New Caledonia and the French Republic]. French Senate and National Assembly media release by Philippe Gomès, Philippe Dunoyer and Senator Gérard Poadja.
- Song, L., & Mosses, M. (2018). Revisiting ocean boundary disputes in the South Pacific in light of the South China Sea arbitration: A legal perspective. *The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law*, 33, 768–798.
- Song, L., Mosses, M., & Giraudeau, G. (2023). The ambiguous history of Matthew and Hunter Islands: Tracing the roots of Vanuatu and French claims. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 58(3), 232–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2022.2146577>
- Strating, R., & Wallis, J. (2021). *Climate change and maritime boundaries: Pacific responses and implications for Australia* [Regional outlook working paper 66]. Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University. <https://blogs.griffith.edu.au/asiainsights/climate-change-and-maritime-boundaries-pacific-responses-and-implications-for-australia/>
- Tabangcora, B. (2018). *Giving a dog its teeth back: Reforming the powers of the Malvatumauri in Vanuatu* [Research paper]. Victoria University Faculty of Law. <https://ir.wgtn.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/a335429d-f315-4cc1-b9f4-f23d0f67c12a/content>

- Talbot Wood, L. (2021). *Canoes, kava, kastom and the politics of culture on Aneityum* [PhD thesis, University of Oregon]. Scholar's Bank. <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/items/7e40201a-a328-4bc7-b741-8e2fec0ca8de>
- Taonui, R. (2006). Polynesian oral traditions. In K. R. Howe (Ed.), *Vaka moana, voyages of the ancestors: The discovery and settlement of the Pacific* (pp. 23–55). David Bateman.
- Tempête autour des deux îlots [Storm around the two islets]. (2009, July 30). *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*. <https://www.lnc.nc/article/politique/tempete-autour-des-deux-ilots>
- Tepahae, P. (1997). Chiefly power in southern Vanuatu. *SSGM Discussion Paper*, 97/7. Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/5f1fff839c13>
- Tepahae, P., & Lynch, J. (2001). *Anejom dictionary: Diksonari blong Anejom: Nitasviitai a nijitas antas Anejom*. Pacific Linguistics.
- Teulières-Preston, M.-H. (2000). *Le droit maritime kanak et ses transformations* [Kanak maritime law and its evolution]. In A. Bensa & I. Leblic (Eds.), *En pays Kanak* (pp. 129–146). Editions de la maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Tutugoro, A. (2020). Incompatible struggles? Reclaiming Indigenous sovereignty and political sovereignty in Kanaky and/or New Caledonia. *DPA Discussion Paper*, 2020/50. Australian National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/NJ47-SH23>
- Union Calédonienne (2017). *Après 2018 : notre vision de la Nation* [After 2018: Our vision for the nation]. Union Calédonienne. <https://unioncaledonienne.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Projet-de-Nation-Union-Cal%C3%A9donienne.pdf>

Union progressiste mélanésienne. (2009, July 29). *Accord de Kéamu* [The Keamu Accord] [Media release].

United Nations. (2012, December 18). *Economic and other activities which affect the interests of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories*. Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/67/126. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/Res/67/126>

United Nations. (2021, December 9). *Question of New Caledonia*. Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/76/98. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/76/98>

United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. (2009, September 2). *Summary of recommendations of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in regard to the submission made by France in respect of French Guiana and New Caledonia regions on 22 May 2007*. Adopted by the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

Wilkie, A. (1965, November 21). [Letter from Alexander Mair Wilkie, UK Resident Commissioner, to judges of the New Hebrides Joint Court]. New Hebrides Condominium archives (J/L135.65), Port Vila.

Willie, R. (2021, March 11). Plaque removed in 1983 on Hunter island showed to public. *Vanuatu Daily Post*. [https://www.dailypost.vu/news/plaque-removed-in-1983-on-hunter-island-showed-to-public/article\\_51464e42-81f0-11eb-83ad-7312b3436777.html](https://www.dailypost.vu/news/plaque-removed-in-1983-on-hunter-island-showed-to-public/article_51464e42-81f0-11eb-83ad-7312b3436777.html)

## Oceanic diplomacy: Learning from talanoa diplomacy

JOPE TARAI

The Talanoa Dialogue introduced in 2017 to the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP 23) by the then Fiji prime minister, Voreqe Bainimarama, was hailed a success in replacing the initial structured Facilitative Dialogue format. The Facilitative Dialogue had been intended as a stocktaking exercise to review the collective contributions of parties towards their commitment to the Paris Agreement in 2015. The design and modality of the Facilitative Dialogue was an ongoing process, which Fiji capitalised on to amplify the prime minister's international profile, in his new role as the COP23 president. To amplify and distinguish his COP23 presidency, Bainimarama and his team rebranded Facilitative Dialogue as Talanoa Dialogue. This rebranding was an obvious attempt at Oceanic indigenisation of international diplomacy, as a marker of distinction for the term of the COP23 presidency. The Bainimarama government subsequently emphasised Oceanic and cultural values related to *talanoa* as a concept. These included avoiding confrontational exchanges while building

empathy and understanding in climate-related discussions. At the outset it seemed novel and empowering to some, who saw this positioning as a promotion and cultural appreciation of indigenous and Oceanic identity (indigeneity) within a Eurocentric diplomatic system. However, a deeper examination reveals an insidious form of cultural appropriation and careless exotification by Fiji as a state entity, through the direction of the Bainimarama government.

This chapter argues that the talanoa concept was co-opted by the Bainimarama government within the Fiji state, which subsequently resulted in the appropriation of a shared Oceanic concept and reckless exotification of Fijian indigeneity. It clarifies this argument by detailing critiques and instances of what can be best described as forms of ‘cultural cringe’. The chapter is reflexively informed by the author’s positional relationality, as an indigenous Fijian commoner and researcher of Pacific diplomacy and regionalism. It discusses what talanoa is and what it means within the Fijian context and generally in Oceania. Furthermore, it connects to the noted significance and successes of the Bainimarama government’s adoption of the term in international climate diplomacy. The chapter concludes by outlining a cautionary framework, through a set of grounded questions designed to help avoid appropriation and exotification of indigeneity and culture in Oceanic diplomacy.

## **Indigenous Fijian positionality**

It would be incomplete to critically examine Talanoa diplomacy as an extension of Oceanic diplomacy without recognition and acknowledgement of Pacific culture and context. In effect, cultural context and spaces underpin Pacific research methodologies and the emphasis of the Pacific peoples’ ontological and epistemological position (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Naepi, 2019; Thaman, 2003). Through notable Pacific thinkers, Pacific-grounded research design and framework is more or less centred on positionality and relationality, sometimes referred to as positional relationality (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019; Hau‘Ofa, 2008;

Malungahu, 2022, 2022; Nabobo-Baba, 2008; Naepi, 2019; Thaman, 2003). Positionality and relationality are an acknowledgement and recognition of a person's varying identities and roles that can relate to one's research context (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019; Rowe, 2014). As such, this chapter is informed, guided and will be clarified by the author's relational positionality as an indigenous Fijian commoner and long-suffering student of Pacific diplomacy and regionalism. The author is a struggling PhD student, perceived cisgender male Fijian tax or debt payer and continues to survive relative to the apparatus of the Fijian state and its government. Positional relationality creates a reflexive method and approach to critiquing social and cultural constructs. This is perhaps best articulated by the timeless words of Epeli Hau'ofa, 'every analysis of social and cultural situations is in part a self-exploration by the analyst' (Hau'ofa, 1990).

In essence, the chapter is informed and grounded through the author's intersecting and relational identities as an indigenous Fijian commoner. This is aided with reflexive and ethnographic observations of diplomacy from within the Fiji state and society.

## **The Talanoa Dialogue**

The word *talanoa* in the broad indigenous Fijian understanding means simply to talk to another in sharing stories or views. Pacific scholar Sitiveni Halapua describes talanoa as 'engaging in dialogue with, or telling stories to each other absent [of] concealment of the inner feelings and experiences that resonate in our hearts and minds' (Halapua, 2008). As a concept, talanoa is acknowledged across a number of Pacific Island nations, some of which include, Samoa, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue and Hawai'i (Prescott, 2008). Talanoa has also become a qualitative method in Pacific research methodologies, which has been specified by Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2012) as much deeper than the method of an 'informal open-ended interview'. Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2012) argue that empathy is a central element

in talanoa in unpacking the socio-ecological political impacts and culturally appropriate forms within research methods. The Bainimarama government has now catapulted talanoa into international diplomacy and statecraft.

The Talanoa Call to Action was announced at the 24th presidency of the Conference of the Parties (COP24) in 2018, which was built through the COP23 presidency to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2018). The announcement was aimed to engage a wide expanse of related stakeholders in mobilising concerted efforts towards the ambitions of the Paris Agreement on climate change. The Paris Agreement in 2015 was hailed a success for a number of reasons. One of these was the acceptance of 1.5°C as the global temperature limit, instead of 2°C. This was an important common position for the Pacific countries that was seen regionally as a reflection of the Pacific's influence in their international efforts (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program, 2015). The significance of the Pacific's involvement was a testament to its ongoing regional and internationally positioned groups and narratives. By 2017, Fiji sought to capitalise on the Pacific's international presence and amplify its role and relevance as the COP23 president. This led to the introduction of the Talanoa Dialogue under the Bainimarama government of Fiji, with Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama as the COP23 president at the time. The dialogue format, previously called the Facilitative Dialogue, was seen as a central stocktake component of the Paris Agreement. Within a cycle of every five years, a stocktake on nationally determined contributions was required to guide progress towards collectively agreed goals (Rajamani, 2017). However, there wasn't a clear design and modality for the Facilitative Dialogue at the time (Rajamani, 2017). In the development of the design and modality, talanoa was introduced by an expert working group through the input of Fiji's UN Ambassador at the time, Nazhat Shameem Khan (Vaidyula & Ellis, 2017). This quickly developed into the Talanoa Dialogue under Fiji's COP23 presidency. The Fiji COP23 presidency at

the time outlined key guidelines to operationalise the Talanoa Dialogue at an international level.

The Talanoa Dialogue consisted of two structures, namely the preparatory and political phase (COP24) (Fiji Government, 2018). The preparatory phase involved a number of interactive events, which included the launching of an online platform where stakeholders effectively participated and engaged in the processes. The processes culminated in analytical policy insights that were directed by three guiding questions (Fiji Government, 2018). These questions included: Where are we? Where do we want to go? and How do we get there? In essence, the preparatory phase was to create evidence-based positions to inform the political phase. A central element in this phase was the inter-sessional Talanoa Dialogue that saw an opening plenary and a full-day of working group meetings, which then reported to the plenary. The political phase was guided by the preparatory phase. The political phase was focused on an interactive participation format for the ministers, as a stocktake of collective efforts in the nationally determined contributions of the Parties (Fiji Government, 2018). In sum, the main features of the dialogue included the collation of online submissions, discussions and input to be guided under the authority of presidencies of COP23 and COP24 to finalise a report, which will be informed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C (Fiji Government, 2018). Interestingly, the other features of the Talanoa Dialogue included the dialogue being constructive, facilitative, solutions oriented, devoid of confrontational exchanges and conducted in the 'spirit of Pacific tradition of Talanoa' (Fiji Government, 2018).

## **Significance and successes**

The Talanoa Dialogue was hailed a success in terms of its process, structure and Pacific positioning. Fiji was particularly self-congratulatory in hailing the success of the process in creating a space to share stories

and inspire action. At the end of the political phase as COP23 president, Prime Minister Bainimarama highlighted the dialogue as a critical solutions-focused tool that would drive more action towards a grounded global climate agenda. Bainimarama thanked the delegates for embracing what he described as the '*Talanoa* spirit' that did not involve finger-pointing and blaming certain parties, while capturing the world's imagination with the Pacific concept of inclusive decision-making (Kate, 2018; Toitoóna, 2018).

In terms of structure, there was much optimism about the inclusion of non-state actors, such as civil society and private sector representatives in informing the preparatory phase, which was then to report to the political phase involving ministers. There was a sense of a dual structured layer, with a more inclusive process at the outset producing insights that inform the political layer, comprising the key ministerial decision-makers. Optimistic suggestions were focused on the technicalities of having the Talanoa Dialogue as a staging ground for global stocktaking that was due to take place in 2023 (Lesniewska & Siegele, 2018). It is unclear as to what extent this was possible, as there wasn't much detailed by the Fijian COP23 presidency with regards to the modalities that may have been used to test or stage possible global stocktaking. In addition, it is also instructive to note that the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic may have had an impact on focus and planned global stocktaking progress.

The most significant point of praise was around the veneer of Pacific Island positioning and leveraging of the so-called Pacific ways of engagement in the international diplomatic system. Kirsch (2020) claimed that Fiji's leadership was to counter the passive representations of Pacific Islanders in global climate change and the depiction of vulnerability that came with climate impacts. Kirsch (2021) further argued that Fiji's facilitation of policy discussions on climate change was by no means a form of cultural appropriation by a multilateral system, neither was it an intentional communications framing by Fiji. In essence, the dialogue was lauded as an important Pacific-inspired framing, positioned within the politics of global climate change.

Of all these acclaimed successes of the Talanoa Dialogue, the claim of Pacific positioning, leveraging and implied cultural appreciation or promotion is perhaps the most misguided and exaggerated claim.

### **Critique and cultural cringe**

The Bainimarama Talanoa Dialogue was a Fiji-centric representation that was facilitated through a cunningly concealed form of cultural appropriation and exotification of indigenous identity, which subsequently skewed representation of the Pacific. In effect, at a regional level there was little to no consultative engagement with key Pacific neighbours; therefore, the Bainimarama Talanoa Dialogue was anything but Pacific. Pacific scholars and observers with deeper informed knowledge have followed quite closely how the Fiji state co-opted the concept and term *talanoa* without adequate due respect for informed inclusion, participation and engagement of its Pacific neighbours. The Bainimarama government at a regional level did not consider consulting its key Pacific neighbours, especially the most climate vulnerable on the use of *talanoa* as a pan-Pacific positioning and leveraging tool. There wasn't any due consideration of at least broaching the use of the term with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, as the convening space for Pacific states. Granted, all states are free to pursue their national interests but the indigenous term of *talanoa* is a shared concept that does not belong to one state alone. Evidence of this self-motivated positioning was noted by Fiji-based Pacific Conference of Churches Climate Officer Frances Namoumou. Namoumou observed that Fiji refused to allow Kiribati and Tuvalu to take on key climate issues such as climate resilience, mitigation and financing at the COP23 in Bonn (Rika, 2018, p. 21). Former Tuvalu Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga later confirmed the claim of being left out but preferred to avoid any diplomatic confrontation with Fiji, opting to re-emphasise the call for global climate action (Rika, 2018, p. 21). Internally, Fiji non-state actors and other Pacific officials were concerned at the blatant disregard the Bainimarama government and COP23 presidency had demonstrated towards its Pacific neighbours.

At a national level, the Bainimarama government, as key driver of the state of Fiji, neglected to consult the indigenous leaders or at least consider engaging an indigenous representative body. In fact, the Bainimarama government's political legitimacy had been mired by the prime minister's role as the 5 December 2006 military coup leader and his earlier actions in the 2000 civilian coup (Firth, Fraenkel, & Lal, 2009; Narsey, 2017). Compounding this is the fact that the closest indigenous representative body in Fiji that could have been consulted on the use of an indigenous term in diplomatic statecraft, the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), was abolished by Bainimarama in 2012 (Sakai, 2016). This was mainly due to the GCC lack of support for Bainimarama's regime in the wake of the 2006 coup. In a display of what can be best described as anti-indigeneity, targeting language specifically, the Bainimarama government disallowed the use of the vernacular in parliament in 2014 (Kumar, 2023). In 2019, the Bainimarama government augmented indigenous traditional protocols, by removing representative acknowledgements, when the state received the then Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle and Prince Harry (Tarai, 2019). In addition to these two incidents, there were other non-consultative changes relating to the indigenous ethos and structure, such as the controversial Bill 17 amendment to the iTaukei Land Trust Act 1940 (Tarai, 2022). These series of incidents, whether coincidental or otherwise, demonstrate the lack of respect (as a state official not as an indigenous individual) for indigeneity by the COP23 president. Therefore, the Bainimarama government lacked legitimacy and the right to use an indigenous Pacific term and concept on the global stage.

It is very little wonder that COP23 Bonn meeting appeared to trigger what can be best described as moments of 'indigenous cultural cringe'. Moments of cultural cringe are instances when appropriated cultural practice, language and indigeneity are carelessly replicated and mimicked within incompatible settings or contexts. These instances can trigger a visible or concealed reaction of embarrassment or humiliation among the

indigenous owners or custodians of the given culture. These moments are more often than not only discernible through grounded indigeneity and positionality. Therefore, most non-Pacific islander researchers, scholars and commentators may be incapable of experiencing or understanding these instances of indigenous cultural cringe. This is not to suggest that cultural practices can never be interpreted or must be rigid and inflexible, but its evolution and interpreted appreciation must have the informed and grounded permission of its custodians.

Notable moments of indigenous cultural cringe include the poorly planned or inappropriate show casing of kava bowls and related ornaments, coupled with the generic presentation of indigenous Fijian warriors on varying stages during the meeting. As seen in the second image in Figure 20 (see next page), miniature Fijian hair combs were strewn from a central kava bowl as ornaments. There is no way that a kava bowl would be strewn with combs in demonstration of a gathering within the wider indigenous ethos. Even if such demonstrations were merely ornamental, they still indicate a negligent consideration of display, control and appreciation of indigeneity and culture. The generic Fijian warrior symbolism not only reeks of state-sponsored exotification of indigeneity but it is also a reductive colonial trope of the indigenous Fijian as nothing more than a masculine, war club-bearing brute. Compounding these problematic misrepresentations is the obsessively Fiji-centric nature and positioning of display, veiled in the guise of a collectively shared Pacific concept.

## **Conclusion: Cautionary conceptual frame**

The Bainimarama government's positioning of the concept of *talanoa* in an international diplomatic dialogue structure is understandably admirable for keen advocates of Oceanic diplomacy. It was undoubtedly unique in its opportunity and placing within the architecture of climate diplomacy. However, it cannot be denied that the key driver of the state

FIGURE 20: CULTURAL CRINGE MOMENTS



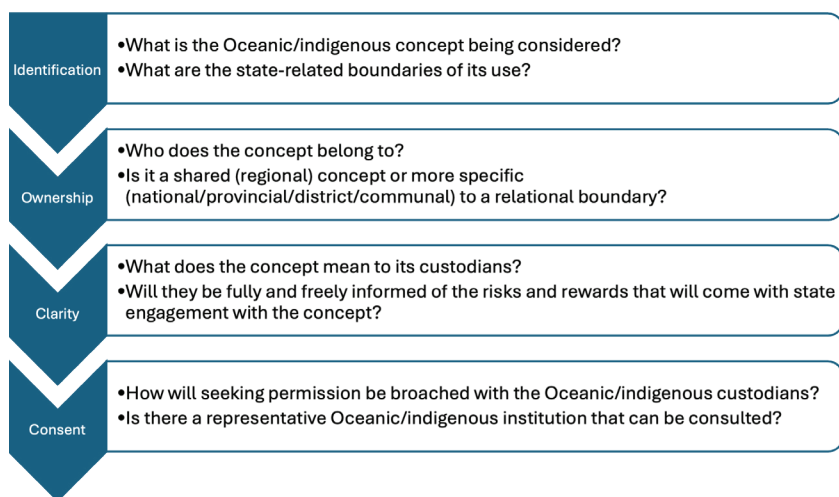
*Photographs by Kiara Worth. Image sourced from UNFCCC and IISD/ENB –used in <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2018/05/07/sunday-talanoa-climate-negotiators-talk-like-people/>*

of Fiji at the time, the Bainimarama government, had neglected to fully consult and seek permission from its fellow indigenous Pacific Island states, as well as its own indigenous people. The regional dimension is especially important considering the shared nature of the concept across a number of Pacific states and the regional prioritisation of climate action. As such, Fiji, and more specifically the former prime minister, lacked Oceanic (regional) and indigenous (domestic) legitimacy and authority to use and proclaim the concept internationally. This provides an important point of consideration, that being an indigenous leader within an indigenous majority country, in a state or official position, does not automatically qualify a person to use and guarantee they will have a legitimate appreciation of an indigenous concept. Conflating

indigenous permission through an official or public position can result in neglecting open and free consultation with indigenous custodians and practitioners of the culture and identity. Ultimately, such forms of conflation, without genuine consultation and possible consent, become superficial and tokenistic forms of indigenisation.

In sum, the case of the Bainimarama Talanoa Dialogue provides an outline for a cautionary framework in the future use of Oceanic diplomacy. The framework is structured along guiding questions, which are anchored around the Oceanic or indigenous concepts of identification, ownership, clarification and custodian-determined consent (Figure 21).

FIGURE 21: A CAUTIONARY FRAMEWORK FOR USING OCEANIC DIPLOMACY



*Source: Author's own work.*

The given cautionary conceptual frame is open and dynamic but serves as a guide to avoid Oceanic diplomacy succumbing to state sponsored appropriation and exotification of indigenous concepts. Any well-intentioned state motivation concerned with indigenising diplomacy can be susceptible to tokenistic forms of representation. Even a state such as Fiji, with a majority indigenous population, led by an indigenous leader, was careless and negligent in respecting the shared meaning and value of talanoa. It ironically did not talanoa

with its Pacific neighbours and its own indigenous people while it hypocritically tried to promote the use of the concept internationally. More time and genuine engagement in freely consulting and engaging with the indigenous or Oceanic custodians would augur well for the appreciation and promotion of Oceanic diplomacy. These matters cannot be rushed or time-bound through policy deadlines or political pressure but require deeper more meaningful relational engagement.

## Acknowledgements

Like most things in Oceania, nothing is possible without shared ideas, thoughts and views. As such, in the course of thinking, writing and rewriting this chapter with its intersecting ideas, I'd like to thank and acknowledge a number of Oceanic thinkers. First, I'd like to acknowledge the Philosopher, Poet and gentle soul, the late Pio Manoa for his endless words of wisdom shared over big bowls of kava in Pacific Harbour. Second, I thank my contemporaries for their shared time, knowledge, patience and encouragement in grounding my disjointed thoughts: Vani Catanasiga, Amerita Ravuvu, Fulori Manoa, Kalolaini Waseimoala Monica Lomani Waqanisau, Iliesa Wise, Sevanaia Sakai and Ratu Eroni Tawake Rakuia. Last but definitely not least, I thank Greg Fry, Morgan A Tuimaleali'ifano and George Carter for your overwhelming patience and guidance in this process. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

## References

- Farrelly, T., & Nabobo-Baba, U. (2012, 3–5 December). *Talanoa as empathic research*. [Paper presentation]. International Development Conference, Auckland.
- Fasavalu, T. I., & Reynolds, M. (2019). Relational positionality and a learning disposition: Shifting the conversation. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 18(2), 11–25.

- Fiji Government. (2018). *Talanoa Dialogue* [Presentation]. COP23, Suva. [https://prdrse4all.spc.int/sites/default/files/session-5\\_talanoa-dialogue.pdf](https://prdrse4all.spc.int/sites/default/files/session-5_talanoa-dialogue.pdf)
- Firth, S., Fraenkel, J., & Lal, B. V. (2009). *The 2006 military takeover in Fiji: A coup to end all coups?* ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/MTF.04.2009>
- Malungahu, G. (2022, June 22). *Pacific research methodologies, methods and wider considerations* [Lecture], Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University, Canberra.
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (2006). *Knowing and learning: An indigenous Fijian approach*. Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (2008). Decolonising framings in Pacific research: Indigenous Fijian Vanua Research Framework as an organic response. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 4(2), 140–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/117718010800400210>
- Naepi, S. (2019). Pacific research methodologies. *Oxford research encyclopedia of education* (p. 10). Oxford University Press.
- Narsey, W. (2017, May 3). Fiji not between the Devil and the deep blue sea [Blog post]. *Narsey on Fiji – Fighting censorship*. <https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/2017/05/03/fiji-not-between-the-devil-and-the-deep-blue-sea-3-may-2017/>
- Prescott, S. M. (2008). Using talanoa in Pacific business research in New Zealand: Experiences with Tongan entrepreneurs. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 4(1), 127–148. <http://doi.org/10.1177/117718010800400111>
- Rajamani, L. (2017). *Structuring the UNFCCC facilitative dialogue* [Background paper]. Centre for Climate Energy Solutions, Centre for Policy Research. <https://www.c2es.org/document/structuring-the-unfccc-2018-facilitative-dialogue/>

- Rika, N. (2018, September). Smoke and mirrors – Fiji’s COP untruths. *Islands Business*, 44(9), 20–22. <https://emag.islandsbusiness.com/wp-content/uploads/flipbook/8/book.html>
- Rowe, W. E. (2014). Positionality. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research* (pp. 628–628), SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446294406.n277>
- Sakai, S. (2016). Native land policy in the 2014 elections. *The people have spoken: The 2014 elections in Fiji* (pp. 135–156). ANU Press.
- Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program. (2015, December 16). *The voice of the Pacific and the Paris Agreement*. <https://www.sprep.org/news/voice-pacific-and-paris-agreement>
- Tarai, J. (2019, January). Breaching indigenusness (indigeneity). *Islands Business*, 45(1), 24–25. <https://emag.islandsbusiness.com/wp-content/uploads/flipbook/19/book.html#p=25>
- Tarai, J. (2022). Fiji. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 34(2), 457–466. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2022.0067>
- Thaman, K. H. (2003). Decolonizing Pacific studies: Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and wisdom in higher education. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 15(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2003.0032>
- Toitoóna, R. (2018, December 22). How successful was the Talanoa Dialogue in COP24? *Solomon Star Newspaper*. <https://earthjournalism.net/stories/how-successful-was-the-talanoa-dialogue-in-cop24>
- Vaidyula, M., & Ellis, J. (2017). *2018 facilitative dialogue: Identifying options for outputs and outcomes, and key questions for modalities* (OECD/IEA Climate Change Expert Group Papers, No. 2017/04). Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. <https://doi.org/10.1787/6169b164-en>

## **‘The steering paddle of our canoe’:**

### **Culture in Vanuatu’s diplomatic practice**

ANNA NAUPA

This chapter explores how Vanuatu has integrated constitutional commitments to cultural diversity and traditional Melanesian values into diplomatic practice, to identify themes of relevance to Oceanic diplomacy. It briefly sketches Vanuatu’s transition from pre-independence indigenous activism to postcolonial modern diplomacy, then reviews three 21st century diplomatic milestones through the lens of Vanuatu culture to identify key elements for Oceanic diplomacy. Drawing from Vanuatu’s founding diplomatic principles and interviews with key officials, it highlights themes of relationality, reconciliation, unity and peacebuilding, illustrated through three vignettes: (1) the cultural adoption of Melanesian Spearhead Group member states by Vanuatu’s provinces; (2) Melanesian inter-state reconciliation and; (3) the factors contributing to the Solomons–Vanuatu signing of the

Mota Lava Treaty in 2016. I propose a framing of Oceanic diplomacy as comprising three inter-linked themes: a) a plurality of diplomatic actors – including cultural and non-state actors; b) the inextricability of cultural values from state diplomacy; and c) the importance of creating legitimate spaces for diplomatic relationships.

‘God and custom must be the sail and steering paddle of our canoe’ (Pacific Institute of Public Policy, 1980/2012), said Vanuatu’s first Prime Minister, Walter Lini, in his inaugural Independence Day speech on 30 July 1980. The founding government’s vision of national unity and nation-building was one where traditional culture (*kastom*) and religion were to exist equally alongside a modern state system that recognises a culturally and linguistically diverse society.<sup>1</sup> These twin values – cultural and spiritual – were foundational to national identity and were woven into the Vanuatu Constitution, which established ‘the united and free Republic of Vanuatu founded on traditional Melanesian values, faith in God and Christian principles.’<sup>2</sup>

The historical colonial context is particularly important to understanding both the transformational effect of Vanuatu’s Constitution, and the centrality of traditional culture to nation-building, including diplomacy. The 1970s New Hebrides pro-independence movement emerged in response to the increasing alienation of indigenous land and indigenous voices by the two colonial powers – Britain and France. The 1914 Protocol that outlined the Joint Condominium Administration<sup>3</sup> structure and protocols protected the rights and interests of British and French nationals to the exclusion of Melanesian islanders. An early political activist, Barak Sope Mautamate, recalls:

---

1 Vanuatu has the highest linguistic diversity per capita in the world.

2 Contained in the Preamble to Vanuatu’s Constitution.

3 The Condominium of the New Hebrides was established in 1906, with the 1914 Joint Protocol later defining the arrangements for joint administration of the islands by Britain and France.

We didn't have a passport. We were stateless. People without nationality. People without identity. We had to create this ... When we went to the UN to talk about our freedom, we travelled without a passport, without any political status.<sup>4</sup>

The lack of political identity, together with the lack of protection for indigenous land rights, was a driving force behind the advocacy, negotiation, ally-building and relationship development that formed the backbone of the independence movement in the early 1970s. Led by the New Hebrides National Party, which became known as the Vanua'aku Pati in 1977, the movement:

started a roving ambassador model in pre-Independence diplomacy, sending people around the region, to neighbours etc ... [ellipsis in the original] looking for empathy, which was important. For example, with the land being owned by custom owners, we needed Constitutional drafters who understood [the centrality of] this sentiment [to independence]. Roving envoys lobbied missions overseas, Council of Churches and the United Nation's Committee of 24 (Decolonisation Committee).<sup>5</sup>

This 'unofficial diplomacy' (McConnell et al., 2012, p. 805) in the form of indigenous rights activism helped build global support for Vanuatu's

---

4 Quoted and translated from Bislama. VBTC Live. (2022, June 2). *Press Klab: The Future of Diplomacy for Vanuatu, Bae Vanuatu hemi stap olsem wanem long wol long 2050?* Facebook. Retrieved June 2, 2022.

5 Interview with Nikenike Vurobaravu, Vanuatu High Commissioner to Fiji, 3 April 2022.

transition to independence.<sup>6</sup> Even in the absence of being a recognised sovereign state, early forms of activist-diplomacy were practised by Melanesian islanders 'at the pulpits and in the nakamals' (Sokomanu, 2022, p. 16) as well as in the shadows, away from colonial scrutiny, with the objective of activating and building support for independence domestically, while also undertaking international lobbying at the South Pacific Forum and the United Nations (Lightner & Naupa, 2005; Natuman, 1995; Taurakoto, 2010; Vohor, 1995).

Indeed, the struggle to achieve independence from a resistant France and a passive Britain was beset with growing tensions and violence by the late 1970s. This continued into 1980, when the newly independent country sought diplomatic assistance through the South Pacific Forum meeting in Tarawa, Kiribati to quash secessionist movements, with Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Australia responding with military support. The 'trauma of the decolonisation process' subsequently had an important influence on post-independence foreign affairs (MacQueen, 1989, p. 38). In opposition to its marginalised New Hebridean status under the joint colonial administration by Britain and France, Vanuatu signalled a more empowered, postcolonial identity of self-determination through ensuring the centrality of traditional cultural values to national and diplomatic affairs.

How do traditional cultural values feature in Vanuatu's diplomacy, and what insights does this offer for conceptualising Oceanic diplomacy? This chapter draws from interviews conducted in 2022 with key ni-Vanuatu diplomatic and political actors, who were asked to reflect on the application of cultural values and principles in Vanuatu's foreign policy

---

6 McConnell et al. (2012, p. 805) describe this as the role played by non-state actors who may not be recognised as formal diplomatic actors but who may still influence diplomatic outcomes in the national interest. In pre-independence Vanuatu, the lack of international political status for pro-independence meant they were forced into engaging in the margins of diplomacy, with the UN Decolonisation Committee as the conduit for formal access to the international diplomatic sphere.

and state diplomatic practice over four decades. Case examples identified through interviews were triangulated using archival and literary sources. These inform this chapter's examination of three selected events in the 21st century that provide a brief historiography of the place of kastom in Vanuatu's diplomacy. I propose a framing of Oceanic diplomacy that recognises the plurality of diplomatic actors, the inextricability of cultural values from state diplomacy, and the importance of creating legitimate spaces for diplomatic relationships.

### **Cultural principles in diplomatic practice**

Political identity, decolonisation and self-determination, and peacemaking are key principles within Vanuatu's diplomatic practice. Nikenike Vurobaravu, one of Vanuatu's first diplomats, describes Vanuatu's early diplomacy as having an emphasis on safeguarding identity, and using dialogue to maintain peace and build empathy between groups.

In our approach we take a Melanesian style of *toktok* [dialogue], we don't go with an ideological approach which is quite transactional. Cultural approaches to diplomatic negotiations have to understand the aspirations of all sides (Nikenike Vurobaravu, Interview, April 3, 2022)

The following vignettes demonstrate cultural practice in Vanuatu's diplomacy, illustrating its role as a manifestation of the constitutional aspirations and an extension of the founding diplomatic principles. The first two vignettes centre on Vanuatu's participation in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG, a sub-regional grouping comprising Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and the pro-independence movement in New Caledonia known as the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste or FLNKS), offering insights into shared Melanesian values of relationality, reciprocity and reconciliation.

The third vignette looks at Vanuatu's relations with neighbouring Solomon Islands with regard to maritime boundaries and furthering decolonisation. Considering these vignettes together, I explain how culture intersects with state diplomacy, and propose useful elements for framing Oceanic diplomacy.

### **1. 'We accept them in our nasara and nakamal' (relationality)**

The 'Melanesian Way' concept articulated by Papua New Guinean lawyer-philosopher Bernard Narakobi (1980) centres Melanesian values as a political ideology for shaping postcolonial Melanesian states. Shared practices of connection, reconciliation and conflict resolution – which are fundamentally about peaceful relations – can often be seen in forms of diplomacy in Vanuatu and with its fellow Melanesian states. As a founding member of the MSG in 1986, Vanuatu regularly advocated for cultural solidarity with fellow founding members PNG and Solomon Islands, alongside FLNKS,<sup>7</sup> the latter joining the MSG in 1998.

As host to the MSG Secretariat in 2008, the people of Vanuatu initiated customary adoptions for all MSG members to demonstrate authentic, deep, cultural connections between Vanuatu and its fellow MSG members. Led by cultural and provincial government leaders, with in-principle support from the national government, each MSG member was embraced by Vanuatu's provincial communities through traditional adoption ceremonies designed to embed connection and relationships. Traditionally, customary adoptions often entail an intersection of naming, group belonging and variable types of access to place, including land. Usually these are a very localised and specific Melanesian system of social reproduction (for example, see Lindstrom 1985). However, the form of adoptions taken at the level of the MSG membership are

---

7 Kanaky membership is via the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front or FLNKS), the pro-independence movement in New Caledonia. See also Arutangai (1995) for further reading about Vanuatu's early efforts with the MSG.

FIGURE 22: MSG MEMBERS ADOPTED BY VANUATU PROVINCES, 2008–2021



*Source: Map developed by author, adapted from map of provinces by DEMIS World Map Server, Wikimedia Commons ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vanuatu\\_Provinces.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vanuatu_Provinces.JPG)). In the public domain.*

primarily a relational expression between groups to invoke a sense of belonging and to link diverse groups to Vanuatu. Due to the group scale in this context, it is not necessarily a specific custom name or access to land rights that is bequeathed, but the symbolic promise of Vanuatu's provincial communities to lend solidarity where needed. Johnny Koanapo, a former senior foreign service official, describes this process as:

part of our cultural diplomacy, it is people-to-people [relations] even without intervention of [national] government. When you go into a nakamal [traditional meeting house] you do not go in as a stranger, but you go with a lead who points you in which direction. A nakamal is a small government of the people. At the country

level, when a country comes into our system, this is how you point them out, and how you relate and give a form of attachment, not as a stranger but as a Melanesian . This is our identity. We are Melanesian, therefore we accept them in our nasara [traditional community gathering space] and nakamal, this is our way (interview, April 18, 2022).

In addition, provincial days were selected to align with the adopted country's national holiday, to symbolise shared connections from local to sub-national and national levels. Examples are briefly described below.

### *Tafea–Kanak*

Marking the adoption of New Caledonia's Kanaky by Vanuatu's Tafea Province,<sup>8</sup> a Tafea–Kanak Festival was held from 20 to 25 July 2009 on Vanuatu's southern island of Tanna. Traditional dances and songs were performed by the hosting Tannese community to welcome Kanaky guests, and a ceremonial blessing was given to the addition of a Kanak 'case' (traditional hut) to the Tafea Province's village of huts representing all islands from across the province. Chiefs from Tafea and from the Sénat Coutumier of New Caledonia exchanged gifts. Vanuatu Prime Minister Edward Natapei, himself from Futuna island in Tafea Province, provided high-level political recognition of the relational exchanges. On 23 July 2009, the Keamu Accord<sup>9</sup> was signed, formally marking a commitment to relations between the Kanak people and the people of Vanuatu, as well as polemically affirming Kanak recognition of the France-disputed Matthew and Hunter islands as part of Vanuatu.<sup>10</sup> The Kanaky delegation was led by Doumai Ambroise, president of the Sénat

---

8 Tafea Province is named from the first letters of the five largest islands in southern Vanuatu: Tanna, Aneityum, Futuna, Erromango and Aniwa.

9 This historical milestone is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this book by Nic Maclellan.

10 France secretly annexed the southernmost islands in 1976.

Coutumier and Victor Tutugoro of the FLNKS, who said on the final day of the festival:

The province of Tafea has initiated [this festival]  
 ... now the roads are open. We have found our  
 links and we will continue to find more [together]  
 ... we can move freely between Kanaky and Tafea.  
 (Sénat Coutumier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie,  
 2009)<sup>11</sup>

### *Malampa – Fiji*

On 10 October 2020, on the occasion of the Malampa<sup>12</sup> Province's annual day, which is shared with Fiji's national day, a major ceremony was organised to celebrate Fiji's 50th Anniversary of Independence. While the day is annually celebrated by Fiji-Malampa communities in Vanuatu, the 2020 event was a particular high point in community relations, with media reports of over 2,000 people involved in a ceremonial exchange of traditional mats, kava, pigs and calico as a symbol of mutual respect (Natonga, 2020). With the theme of 'Strengthening our Melanesian bond – Fiji Malampa celebrating Fiji's golden jubilee', a particular part of the ceremony was the acknowledgement of the Malampa Province community's adoption of Fijians in Vanuatu:

The Fijian community family sat behind these traditional gifts in the middle of the field and watched 'emotionally' as Fijian representative Simone Tuimalega presented the tabua (whales' tooth) which is Fiji's important cultural item and acknowledged the MALAMPA [sic.] community for the adoption on behalf of all Fijians. (Natonga, 2020).

---

11 Translated from the French.

12 Malampa Province is named for its three largest islands: Malekula, Ambrym and Paama.

### *Shefa – West Papua*

In June 2021, Shefa Province performed a traditional adoption ceremony of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP), recognising the ULMWP Provisional Government. Echoing Vanuatu's diplomatic principles regarding decolonisation and self-determination, Secretary-General Morris Kaloran said, 'Until the people of West Papua are free, no one in Melanesia is free.'<sup>13</sup> He declared the traditional adoption another step in the formation of a long-term friendship between West Papuan people and the government, chiefs and people of Shefa Province (Bule, 2021).

The examples provided in this vignette underscore a recognition of the inter-dependence of societies and people within Vanuatu diplomacy. The cultural value of connection, reciprocity through ceremonial exchange, and developing relations between people and groups, is an important feature of Vanuatu's diplomatic practice in the Melanesian and Pacific region. The extension of practice beyond the state, to include sub-national, non-state and community levels, and its acceptance and recognition by state officials, portrays a harmonised diplomatic practice at the different levels guided by a sense of shared, embedded cultural values.

## **2. 'Each of us represents pandanus leaves that are woven together into a mat' (reconciliation and unity)**

Relations between Vanuatu and MSG member states have been tested on a few occasions. Solomon Islander scholar, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka (2015) summarises media coverage of a 2010 row that ensued between Fiji and Vanuatu after:

---

13 This statement echoes a statement widely attributed to first Vanuatu Prime Minister Walter Lini that '*Vanuatu is not free until all Melanesia is free*' and popularised in modern use by civil society and political actors alike. Lini's statement is an adaptation of first Vanuatu President Sokomanu's 1981 statement at the South Pacific Forum that 'Until all the people of our great ocean are truly free, none of us are.'

the then prime minister Edward Natapei refused to give up the MSG chairmanship to the Fiji prime minister and coup leader Commodore Bainimarama, arguing that 'there are basic fundamental principles and values of democracy and good governance that our organisation is built on, and we must continue to uphold them'. (Radio Australia, 2010, quoted in Kabutaulaka 2015, p. 133)

Vanuatu Prime Minister Edward Natapei called off the MSG Summit in July, preventing Fiji from assuming chairmanship, with political tensions rising between the countries ('Vanuatu PM pulls out of MSG talks', 2010).

In early December 2010, the Solomon Islands Government agreed to step in as a mediator and host a special MSG meeting to reconcile Fiji and Vanuatu in response to an earlier request made by Prime Minister Natapei ('PM Philip to host MSG meeting in December', 2010). By this time, Natapei had been ousted by Sato Kilman, who became Vanuatu's Prime Minister, shifting Natapei to the position of leader of the opposition. The Solomon Islands Government held similar views to Natapei's earlier advocacy to uphold democratic values, yet felt that Fiji's continued political isolation might do more harm than good in helping Fiji achieve democratic elections. The *Solomon Times* newspaper reported:

Prime Minister Philip says the founding pillars of the MSG builds on the Melanesian countries' common cultural ties and that the MSG would seek to tap on [sic] these unique links to help resolve the Fiji issue. He says this approach is the Pacific way of doing things. ('PM Philip to host MSG meeting in December', 2010)

Seeking political legitimacy during his isolation as a coup leader, Bainimarama sent Fiji's foreign minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola to the MSG Summit in Honiara for the handing over of the chairmanship. On 15 December 2010, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Danny Philip thanked Prime Minister Kilman and minister Kubuabola for attending the special summit and participating in a traditional reconciliation ceremony. Solomon Islands media reported the event widely, airing an image of all the Melanesian leaders holding hands in a circle in reconciliation. The following excerpts from the *Solomon Times*, which closely reported the event over several days. Firstly, there was an emphasis on Melanesian-style reconciliation:

Prime Minister Philip said that the reconciliation ceremony is a testimony of the 'value, strength, and relevance of the Melanesian cultures and traditions including the role of chiefs in settling differences.' ('Fiji handed MSG chairmanship', 2010)

And then an emphasis emerged on the link between Melanesian values and MSG solidarity:

Prime Minister Danny Philip says he is confident that 'Melanesian countries have now entered a new era of MSG solidarity [...] the Prime Minister said that this new [era] will be one that is grounded on the 'traditions and cultures of Melanesian brotherhood.'

He explained that with the reconciliation ceremony yesterday 'it clearly shows that Melanesian countries do not need to go to the United Nations or international courts to solve our problems but solve them at our own soil.'

'The reconciliation ceremony had been the first of its kind and symbolizes the importance of Melanesian culture and tradition in the relationship of MSG countries'. ('New era of MSG solidarity: PM Philip', 2010)

Fiji's Foreign Minister Kubuabola was reported to have said:

'The event today has brought us together as Melanesian brothers', he said. 'Similarly, in our customs when two brothers have a problem another brother will always be there to make sure we sort things out and today MSG has witnessed a historic event. This would not have happened without our brothers from Solomon Islands.' (Marau, 2010)

Vanuatu's Prime Minister Kilman also acknowledged Solomon Islands' mediating role, and likened MSG relations to a woven mat:

Each of us represents pandanus leaves that are woven together into a mat. Therefore, we must remain intact. Thank you Solomon Islands and also our brothers and sisters from PNG, New Caledonia and Fiji who are here today. (Marau, 2010)

There are few public accounts that provide further detail of the reconciliation process that took place in Honiara and the specific parts played by the various states. Based on available photographic records, we can assume that reciprocal exchanges of items of traditional wealth (mats, pigs, shells etc) and prayer were part of the reconciliation process.

A second reconciliation event took place in Suva, Fiji in 2013, when Natapei became foreign minister under a new Vanuatu government

led by Prime Minister Moana Carcasses. On 11 April 2013, aiming to redress his personal role in the breakdown in relations between Vanuatu and Fiji, Natapei tasked the then Director General for Foreign Affairs, Johnny Koanapo, to make arrangements for a second Melanesian reconciliation with Fiji (Garae, 2020). The Fiji coup government issued a press release in 2013 entitled 'Vanuatu presents Matanigasau to seek forgiveness' sharing some of the dialogue between Fiji foreign minister Ratu Inoke and Vanuatu foreign minister Natapei (Fiji Government, 2013). The press release reported Natapei's words in the following terms:

'I speak on behalf of my government and the people of Vanuatu to say sorry for all the things we've done,' Mr Natapei said.

'As a chief and government leader, I feel that it is always right to seek forgiveness in the traditional and Melanesian way.'

Responding to Natapei's customary gesture, Fiji's foreign minister reportedly said:

'We are humbled by what you have done and I accept your forgiveness on behalf of the Prime Minister and people of Fiji,' Minister Kubuabola said.

Minister Kubuabola said the traditional apology is a new stepping stone for the relationship between the two countries and reaffirmed Minister Natapei that this will further deepen and strengthen ties between the two countries. ('Vanuatu presents matanigasau to seek forgiveness from government', 2013)

The press release briefly described the occasion from the Fijian government's perspective. *Matanigasau* is a traditional Fijian forgiveness

ritual that involves the presentation of a *tabua* (a whale's tooth, the highest form of traditional wealth in Fiji).

Johnny Koanapo's recollection of this event reflects the combined cultural traditions of Natapei's home island of Futuna in southern Vanuatu and the Fijian *matanigasau*:

As a career diplomat, we are taught a particular role and are also raised in traditional reconciliation systems. We brought the shells, mats and organized with the Vanuatu mission to prepare [for the reconciliation]. We tried to meet Bainimarama but couldn't, and instead performed it with Fiji Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke. The Fijians were sitting on the floor as per their culture. Natapei entered on his knees holding the shell.<sup>14</sup> It was very emotional. It was my first time to see a leader humble himself in this way to say sorry. They brought *yaqona* [or kava, a traditional Pacific drink with relaxing properties] at the end. Culture plays so much when it comes to conflict resolution.

Seeking forgiveness as diplomatic strategy was important to moving beyond the political impasse within the MSG. According to Cretton (2005, p. 404), it can 'address a breaking down in relationships' and played a useful role in diplomatic reconciliation at the time.

Across both reconciliation ceremonies, the overriding shared cultural value – and diplomatic principle – was the maintenance of peaceful relations and unity. The practice of reconciliation and the centrality of

---

<sup>14</sup> Culturally, it is a signal of respect to lower oneself or one's head in a customary ceremony with leaders even when of equal seniority. As the event took place with all parties seated on the ground, approaching the space on the knees was the appropriate customary gesture.

relationality between states and diplomatic actors is clearly evidenced in this vignette. The site of reconciliation also has significance. The first reconciliation was facilitated in a third-party state (Solomon Islands), creating a neutral space for conciliatory dialogue. This occurrence enabled continued diplomatic dialogue between MSG states and Fiji on its own return to democracy, in which both Vanuatu Prime Ministers Kilman and Natapei played a role in the Pacific Island Forum's Ministerial Contact Group on Fiji. The second reconciliation, which occurred two years after the Vanuatu-Fiji dispute, took place in the heart of Fiji's diplomatic centre at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Natapei's symbolic humility recognised that due to his absence from the previous 2010 reconciliation event resulting from domestic politics, there was still air to clear in order for him to continue leading diplomatic relations authentically between the two neighbours. Both forms of reconciliation events were essential for authentically creating space for indigenous diplomatic dialogue, a process that has been described in First Nation contexts by Greg Fry (2020) as a form of 'weaving the mat,' echoing Kilman's 2010 analogy of states representing pandanus leaves woven together in a mat.

### **3. Addressing the unfinished business of decolonisation together (peacebuilding with mutual respect)**

The importance of peaceful relations is evident in maritime boundary negotiations, the context for this chapter's third vignette. Reaching agreement between Vanuatu and its closest northern neighbour, Solomon Islands, was surprisingly more protracted than was expected, taking 33 years. Firstly, both nations had been 'living with the legacy of a randomly drawn line on colonial maps' for more than 100 years (Naupa, 2022). Secondly, the technical approach to maritime boundary negotiations dictated by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III) was reported to not leave sufficient room for a cultural approach, despite long-established cultural connections and practice (Diamana, 2016; Naupa, 2022). Completing border delineations between Solomons and Vanuatu was an essential part of the "unfinished

business” of independence’, a senior Vanuatu government negotiator, Sangavulu Tevi, said. ‘But it needed to be inclusive of a cultural approach, which the technically bureaucratic UNCLOS process did not really give room for’ (Sangavulu Tevi quoted in Naupa, 2022, p. 1). He described this challenge in these terms:

The UNCLOS process prioritised the line, but for Vanuatu, the relationship was more important than the line; the line was not to divide, but to bridge our nations. We just needed to sit down and share kava or betel nut and work it out without the experts pulling us back to coordinates and reef points. (Sangavulu Tevi, quoted in Naupa, 2022, p. 1)

This process required creating space for cultural provisions that recognised Melanesian bonds – shared histories, languages and identities – to seal a maritime boundary agreement (one which eventually became known as the Mota Lava Treaty)<sup>15</sup>. Of the final negotiation, Walter Diamana (2016), a senior Solomon Islands government official, wrote online:

Melanesians are known for their respect toward family, a connection they cherish from their historical ancestors to the present generation ... a ... group of people linking to a shared genealogy of five generations past is recognized by their blood linkages as belonging to the same family. Temotu Province of the Solomon Islands and Torba Province in Vanuatu, straddling the maritime border between the two states, share this same value; they maintain

---

<sup>15</sup> The border agreement between the two countries, named the Tirvau Agreement, was later signed in June 2024 between Solomon Islands Prime Minister Jeremaiah Manele and Vanuatu Prime Minister Charlot Salwai (Iroga, June 21, 2024).

closer relations thanks to their historical and ancestral ties.

Indeed, the border communities of Temotu and Torba Provinces played a key role in the ceremonial and performative diplomacy that was a central part of the signing of the historical maritime boundary agreement – the Mota Lava Treaty – by then prime ministers Charlot Salwai of Vanuatu and Manasseh Sogovare of Solomon Islands on 7 October 2016.

Named after the Vanuatu island where the event took place, the Mota Lava Treaty was signed in the wake of ceremonial dances, feasts and customary exchanges by the two countries and sealed with the drinking of kava and chewing of betel nut. 'I am proud to be a Melanesian', said Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogovare in his public address. 'The white man drew imaginary lines [between the islands] .... but we are one people!' ('Vanuatu's first border treaty agreement with Solomon Islands: Mota Lava Treaty', 2016).

The traditional ceremony that preceded the Treaty signing contained various local culturally symbolic elements, designed to assure each party of the authentic intent of a border treaty. First, traditional chiefs and faith led the way in the ceremonial rites, adorned with traditional mats, feathers and pig tusks, chanting, dancing and wielding *namele* leaves – a traditional Vanuatu symbol of respect and peacemaking – to gain customary permission from the people of Mota Lava to utilise their land for a state treaty signing. To demonstrate this was not tokenistic, the day then proceeded to celebrate the Torba–Temotu Cultural Arts Festival, including a traditional pig-killing ceremony, custom dances, and sharing of traditional *kakae* (food), kava and betel nut, signalling the value placed on cultural relations. An intent of the 2016 Torba–Temotu Cultural Arts Festival was to signal the priority placed on cultural relationships and cooperation, to pave the way for the bureaucratic signing of the Mota Lava Treaty by the prime ministers of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In doing so, the traditional ceremony demonstrated the centrality

of respect for local customs in the matter of establishing sovereign borders. It legitimised the boundary agreement at both community and national levels in a manner that resonated with those primarily affected: the Torba–Temotu provincial communities and the governments of Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Performing ceremonial dances, feasts and cultural exchanges of traditional items of wealth while also ‘wielding namele leaves’, the traditional communities gave customary permission for the national leaders to utilise their ancestral land for a state treaty signing (Naupa, 2022).

Manasseh Sogovare, then Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, is reported to have described the occasion in these terms:

‘There’s a lot of historical connection between the people of Temotu Province and Torba Province, especially with regards to the Church of Melanesia. A lot of things originated from Mota Lava. We found out that the language of the church in its early days was Mota Lava too, so when they recited history we found it very interesting.’

‘The beautiful thing about the agreement is that there was a lot of understanding between the two parties. There was no fighting. A lot of custom and culture was incorporated into it.’

‘[T]he agreement also sends a powerful message to the world that Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have successfully applied custom values in sorting out their maritime border issues and not the Law of the Sea Convention which would have resulted in the loss of a lot of area by either party.’ (‘Treaty provides avenue for further cooperation: Sogovare’, 2016)

The sealing of the Mota Lava Treaty with kava and betel nut would not have been possible without the participation of traditional and church leaders alongside the government bureaucrats, diplomats and technical experts. While the point at which these cultural and non-state actors are brought into a diplomatic process may vary, their role consistently enhances the legitimacy of the diplomatic event.

FIGURE 23. FORMAL SIGNING OF THE MOTA LAVA TREATY MARITIME BORDER DELINEATION BETWEEN VANUATU AND SOLOMON ISLANDS, OBSERVED BY CULTURAL AND FAITH LEADERS, 7 OCTOBER 2016



(L–R: Vanuatu Prime Minister Charlot Salwai, Temotu Chief Patterson Oti, Anglican Bishop Patterson Worek and Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogovare) Source: Government of Vanuatu, 2016.

At the signing of the Mota Lava Treaty, the joint presence of Bishop Patterson Worek from the Anglican Church of Melanesia, the head of the Vanuatu Christian Council, Pastor Obed Moses Tallis (later President of Vanuatu), the Paramount Chiefs of Mota Lava and Temotu Province Chief Jerry Alpie and Chief Patterson Oti (also Premier of Temotu Province), Vanuatu President Baldwin Lonsdale (also an

Anglican priest)<sup>16</sup> and both Prime Ministers Manasseh Sogovare of Solomon Islands and Charlot Salwai of Vanuatu, sent a clear signal about this historic diplomatic event: Oceanic diplomacy extends beyond the immediate state bureaucracies and encompasses traditional, community and sub-national leaders<sup>17</sup>; and in doing so, it progresses the decolonisation project.

## Conclusion

What do these vignettes depicting the application of cultural values to Vanuatu's diplomacy offer in terms of framing Oceanic diplomacy? In concluding, I discuss the three key contributions they make below.

### **a) A plurality of diplomatic actors – including cultural and non-state:**

Across all the vignettes, a prominent theme is that of a plurality of actors in Oceanic diplomacy, both formal diplomatic, and cultural and non-state actors. Oceanic diplomacy extends beyond immediate state bureaucracies to encompass traditional and community leaders, faith-based actors and individual community members. Recognition that state actors and diplomats are only one facet of Oceanic diplomacy has administratively practical implications in small Pacific bureaucracies. It also has deep political implications for recognising shared, multi-actor responsibilities in diplomatic practice. In addition it reflects the rich heritage of thousands of years of intercultural relationships in our Blue Pacific. Akin to 'network diplomacy' (Naupa, 2017, p. 913), Oceanic diplomacy engages with wide multi-actor networks beyond state diplomatic channels to effect diplomatic outcomes.

---

16 Vanuatu President Lonsdale passed away on 17 June 2017 while still in office.

17 The Secretary General of Torba Province Ketty Napwatt was also involved in the process leading up to the Mota Lava Treaty signing, however transport difficulties from the provincial headquarters on Vanua Lava island to the event in Mota Lava island prevented her participation on the day.

**b) The inextricability of cultural values from state diplomacy:**

Diplomatic practice rests on state-based principles and values. Its bedrock in community-based cultural practice where local ways of relating and engaging – *fasin blong ples* (or ‘the ways of the place’ in Bislama) – are embedded throughout, shaping vernacular diplomacy. The high value placed by Vanuatu’s constitution on Melanesian values and traditional culture translates into the way in which diplomatic engagement takes place with its Pacific neighbours, and in the way in which a wider variety of actors are able to participate in cross-community/border relations. Values of reciprocity, Melanesian solidarity and unity, reconciliation and peacemaking are evidenced in the vignettes described in this chapter.

**c) The importance of creating legitimate spaces for diplomatic relationships:**

By looking at political geographies or communities as the foundational units of diplomatic interaction, we can begin to see ‘diplomacy’ practised in a greater variety of forms: in relations between clans, islands, societies and provinces/local governments. According to Solomon Islands scholar Gordon Nanau (2011), located within these multi-layered systems of diplomacy for Melanesia is the significance of the *wantok* system as a socio-economic and political network in Melanesia for understanding political behaviour in the context of the nation-state. Nanau (2011) defines the wantok system as a ‘pattern of relationships and networks that link people in families and regional localities’ noting that the term is also a reference to provincial, national and subregional identities’ (Nanau, 2011, p. 32). Vanuatu scholar Gregoire Nimbtik (2016) further nuances these relational patterns within the concept of a ‘nakamal system’, where the symbol of a traditional meeting house, or nakamal, provides a ‘place of peace’ for convening and facilitating dialogue between multiple identities and systems, to find solutions to any conflicts (Nimbtik, 2016, pp. 203–4). Together, the wantok and nakamal systems underscore the valued relational practices that are highlighted across all vignettes in this chapter.

There is clearly value in continued nuancing of diplomatic practice in Oceania, as highlighted by these vignettes from Vanuatu. A key question we must ask in this work of nuancing is whether a common framing of Oceanic diplomacy risks selectively privileging or marginalising some of the Pacific's diverse historical and cultural ways of engaging. In acknowledging this tension, I find relevance in Beier's astute observation that indigenous culturally-based diplomacies:

frequently operate in entirely *sui generis* [unique] ways and challenge us to break with many of the fundamental assumptions and conceptual commitments by which we are accustomed to rendering diplomatic practices intelligible as such. (Beier, 2016, p. 643)

By extension, it is important to consider whether it is therefore possible to extract structure and links across the many Pacific diplomacies in conceptualising Oceanic diplomacy, or whether their distinct natures render the exercise futile.

In considering these tensions, and the insights elaborated in this chapter, I have emphasised three themes I believe to be broadly relevant to creating a shared framing of Oceanic diplomacy: a) a plurality of diplomatic actors – whether local and sub-national communities, chiefs, pastors and diplomats; b) the inextricability of cultural values from state diplomacy – relationality, reconciliation and peacemaking between societies and states, which themselves create a broader legitimacy of diplomatic practice to all involved; and c) the importance of creating legitimate spaces for diplomatic relationships – as shown by the diversity of diplomatic contexts, actors and cultural exchanges that may legitimately co-exist.

In offering these insights from cultural practice in Vanuatu's diplomacy, I acknowledge there is still more work to be done regionally, and

academically, to elevate recognition of Pacific cultures' central role as the steering paddle of an Oceanic diplomacy canoe. Until the long history of cultural practices and protocols in Oceanic diplomacy is afforded equal recognition, status and space in the international arena beyond our Blue Pacific Ocean, our metaphorical regional paddlers may toil in vain.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Greg Fry, Howard Van Trease, Nikenike Vurobaravu, Johnny Koanapo and Sangavulu Tevi for their advice and feedback on previous drafts, and the blind peer reviewers and editors for their constructive comments which helped produce this final article.

## References

- Arutangai, S. (1995). Post-independence developments and policies. In H. Van Trease (Ed.), *Melanesian politics: Stael blong Vanuatu* (pp. 59–71). Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Beier, J. M. (2016). Indigenous diplomacy. In C. Constantinou, P. Kerr, & P. Sharp (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of diplomacy* (pp. 642–653). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957930.n53>
- Bislama. VBTC Live. (2022, June 2). *Press Klab: The future of diplomacy for Vanuatu, Bae Vanuatu hemi stap olsem wanem long wol long 2050?* [Facebook livestream post]. Facebook. No longer available online. Retrieved June 2, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=search&v=396900582492938>
- Bule, H. (2021, December 24). SHEFA recognises West Papua. *Vanuatu Daily Post*. [https://www.dailypost.vu/news/shefa-recognises-west-papua/article\\_f8730381-941d-5392-a782-f0995998d30e.html](https://www.dailypost.vu/news/shefa-recognises-west-papua/article_f8730381-941d-5392-a782-f0995998d30e.html)

- Carter, G., Fry, G., & Nanau, G. (2021). *Oceanic diplomacy: An introduction* (DPA In Brief, 2021/23). Australia National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/t84y-dg87>
- Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu 1980* (Vanuatu). <https://www.gov.vu/index.php/about/constitution-of-vanuatu>
- Cretton, V. (2005). Traditional Fijian apology as a political strategy. *Oceania*, 75(4), 403–417. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.2005.tb02899.x>
- Diamana, W. (2016, October 29). The Mota Lava Treaty: A Pacific lesson on maritime dispute settlement. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/10/the-mota-lava-treaty-a-pacific-lesson-on-maritime-dispute-settlement>
- Fiji Government. (2013, April 12). Vanuatu presents matanigasau to seek forgiveness from government [Press release]. <https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/VANUATU-PRESENTS-MATANIGASAU-TO-SEEK-FORGIVENESS-F>
- Fiji handed MSG chairmanship. (2010, December 16). *Solomon Times*. [www.solomontimes.com/news/fiji-handed-msg-chairmanship/5762](http://www.solomontimes.com/news/fiji-handed-msg-chairmanship/5762)
- Firth, S. (2000). Decolonization. In R. Borofsky (Ed.), *Remembrance of Pacific pasts: An invitation to remake history* (pp. 317–18). University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824864163-023>
- Fry, G. (2020, December). Weaving the mat: Creating a space for dialogue in Indigenous Diplomacy. ANU Workshop, Canberra. <https://indigenoudiplomacy.cdu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Weaving-the-Mat-final-June-2021.pdf>
- Fry, G., & Tarte, S. (Eds.). (2015). *The new Pacific diplomacy*. ANU Press. <https://doi.org/10.22459/NPD.12.2015>

- Garae, L. (2020, December 22). Koanapo says late Natapei crawled to say sorry to Fiji. *Vanuatu Daily Post*. [https://www.dailypost.vu/news/koanapo-says-late-natapei-crawled-to-say-sorry-to-fiji/article\\_c4c8c5c4-43df-11eb-91fb-47a338105ced.html](https://www.dailypost.vu/news/koanapo-says-late-natapei-crawled-to-say-sorry-to-fiji/article_c4c8c5c4-43df-11eb-91fb-47a338105ced.html)
- Government of Vanuatu. (2016). *Vanuatu's first border treaty agreement with Solomon Islands: Mota Lava Treaty* [Video documentary]. Government of Vanuatu.
- Iroga, R. (2024, June 21). PM Manele and Vanuatu counterpart sign border agreement in Honiara. *Solomon Business Magazine* [online]. <https://sbm.sb/pm-manele-and-vanuatu-counterpart-sign-border-agreement-in-honiara/>
- Kabutaulaka, T. (2015). Re-presenting Melanesia: Ignoble savages and Melanesian alter-natives. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 27(1), 110–145. <http://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2015.0027>
- Lightner, S., & Naupa, A. (2005). *Histri blong yumi long Vanuatu: an educational resource, Volume 3*. Vanuatu Cultural Centre.
- Lindstrom, L. (1985) Personal names and social reproduction on Tanna, Vanuatu. *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 94 (1), 27–45.
- Lini, W. (1980). *Beyond pandemonium: From the New Hebrides to Vanuatu*. Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- MacQueen, N. (1989). Sharpening the spearhead: Subregionalism in Melanesia. *Pacific Studies*, 12(2), 33–52.
- Marau, D. (2010, December 17). MSG praises Solomons leader for Vanuatu, Fiji reconciliation. Pacific Media Watch. Pacific Media Centre. <https://pmcarchive.aut.ac.nz/pacific-media-watch/region-msg-praises-solomons-leader-fiji-vanuatu-reconciliation-7176.html>

- McConnell, F., Moreau, T., & Dittmer, J. (2012). Mimicking state diplomacy: The legitimizing strategies of unofficial diplomacies. *Geoforum*, 43(4), 804–814. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.01.007>
- McGarry, D. (2019, March 9). ‘France must decolonise’: MP Koanapo. *Vanuatu Daily Post*. [https://www.dailypost.vu/news/france-must-decolonise-mp-koanapo/article\\_f88e8de6-7bc8-5798-83e4-7dbafd9856bb.html](https://www.dailypost.vu/news/france-must-decolonise-mp-koanapo/article_f88e8de6-7bc8-5798-83e4-7dbafd9856bb.html)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade. (2016, October 10). *Treaty provides opportunity to address provincial relationship* [Press release]. Solomon Islands Government. [mfaet.gov.sb/media-center/press-releases/external-trade-news/82-pm-treaty-provides-opportunity-to-address-provincial-relationship.html](http://mfaet.gov.sb/media-center/press-releases/external-trade-news/82-pm-treaty-provides-opportunity-to-address-provincial-relationship.html)
- Nanau, G. (2011). The Wantok system as a socio-economic and political network in Melanesia. *The Journal of Multicultural Society*, 2(1), 31–55. <http://doi.org/10.15685/omnes.2011.06.2.1.31>
- Narokobi, B. (1980). *The Melanesian Way*. University of Papua New Guinea and Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Natonga, A. (2020, October 17). Dawn of a new era between Fiji and MALAMPA communities. *Vanuatu Daily Post*. [https://www.dailypost.vu/news/dawn-of-a-new-era-between-fiji-and-malampa-communities/article\\_ebc2fe90-1191-11eb-b098-5f08180c5831.html](https://www.dailypost.vu/news/dawn-of-a-new-era-between-fiji-and-malampa-communities/article_ebc2fe90-1191-11eb-b098-5f08180c5831.html)
- Natuman, J. (1995). Vanuatu’s sovereignty in jeopardy. In H. Van Trease (Ed.), *Melanesian politics: Stael blong Vanuatu* (pp. 413–426). Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Naupa, A. (2017). Indo-Pacific diplomacy: A view from the Pacific Islands. *Politics & Policy*, 45(5), 902–917. <http://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12226>

- Naupa, A. (2022). *Sealed with kava and betel nut: Lessons in Oceanic diplomacy from the Mota Lava Treaty* (DPA In Brief, 2022/11). Department of Pacific Affairs, Australia National University. <https://doi.org/10.25911/2SGH-D402>
- New era of MSG solidarity: PM Philip (2010, December 17). *Solomon Times*. [www.solomontimes.com/news/new-era-of-msg-solidarity-pm-philip/5766](http://www.solomontimes.com/news/new-era-of-msg-solidarity-pm-philip/5766)
- Newton Cain, T. (2014, March 14). *The Melanesian Spearhead Group: What is it, and what does it do?* The Interpreter. Lowy Institute. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/melanesian-spearhead-group-what-it-and-what-does-it-do>
- Newton Cain, T. (2015). The renaissance of the Melanesian Spearhead Group. In G. Fry & S. Tarte (Eds.), *The new Pacific diplomacy* (pp. 151–160). USP Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/NPD.12.2015.13>
- Nimbtik, G. (2016). *Worlds in collision: An inquiry into the sources of corruption within Vanuatu Government and society* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. RMIT University.
- Pacific Institute of Public Policy. (2012, July 27). *Independence address to Vanuatu by PM Fr Walter Lini, 30 July 1980*. <https://pacificpolicy.org/blog/2012/07/27/independence-address-to-vanuatu-by-the-late-pm-father-walter-lini-30-july-1980/> (Original work published 1980)
- Peake, G., & Forsyth, M. (2022). Street-level bureaucrats in a relational state: The case of Bougainville. *Public Administration and Development*, 42, 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1911>
- PM Philip to host MSG meeting in December. (2010, November 12). *Solomon Times*. [www.solomontimes.com/news/pm-philip-to-host-msg-meeting-in-december/5685](http://www.solomontimes.com/news/pm-philip-to-host-msg-meeting-in-december/5685)

- PM Sogavare to sign maritime border treaty with PM Salwai. (2016, October 5). *Solomon Times*. [www.solomontimes.com/news/pm-sogavare-to-sign-maritime-border-treaty-with-pm-salwai/8583](http://www.solomontimes.com/news/pm-sogavare-to-sign-maritime-border-treaty-with-pm-salwai/8583)
- Premdas, R. R. (1987). Melanesian socialism: Vanuatu's quest for self-definition and problems of implementation. *Pacific Studies*, 11(1), 107–129.
- Premdas, R., & Howard, M. C. (1985). Vanuatu's foreign policy: Contradictions and constraints. *Australian Outlook*, 39(3), 177–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718508444892>
- Radio Australia. (July 13, 2010). Melanesian Spearhead Group Chair Defers Fiji Meet. Radio Australia. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/radio/onairhighlights/melanesian-spearhead-group-chair-defers-fiji>
- Sénat Coutumier de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. (2009). Festival de Tafea – Kanaky 2009 [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zaEh3orz58>
- Sokomanu, A. G. (2022). Ati George Sokomanu. In A. Naupa & A. Howarth (Eds.), *Taf Tumas: Becoming Vanuatu*. Vanuatu Children's Literature Community Initiative/Nabanga Pikinini.
- Taurakoto, P. (2010). The New Hebrides Cultural Association. In R. Prior (Ed.), *25 Tingting: Reflections on 25 years of independence in Vanuatu* (pp. 5–13). Gospel Vanuatu Books.
- Treaty provides avenue for further cooperation: Sogovare. (2016, October 13). *Solomon Times*. [www.solomontimes.com/news/treaty-provides-avenue-for-further-cooperation-sogavare/8590](http://www.solomontimes.com/news/treaty-provides-avenue-for-further-cooperation-sogavare/8590)
- Vanuatu PM pulls out of MSG talks. (2010, December 9). *Solomon Times*. [www.solomontimes.com/news/vanuatu-pm-pulls-out-of-msg-talks/5749](http://www.solomontimes.com/news/vanuatu-pm-pulls-out-of-msg-talks/5749)

- Vohor, S. (1995). UMP foreign policy. In H. Van Trease (Ed.), *Melanesian politics: Stael blong Vanuatu* (pp. 175–180). Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury; Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

## ***Mā whero, mā pango ka oti te mahi:***

The role of indigenous diplomacies  
in the success of the 1997 Burnham  
peace talks

JAYDEN EVETT

The decade-long Bougainville Civil War in Papua New Guinea (PNG) was the costliest conflict in the Pacific since the end of World War II (Momis, 2006). What began as violent protests over the negative impacts of mining in central Bougainville soon became a complex and protracted war (Boege, 2018; Regan, 1998). The ethno-nationalist Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) waged an insurgency against Port Moresby while simultaneously fighting a civil war with the PNG-sympathetic Bougainville Resistance Forces (BRF). At a local level, distinctions between factions quickly became blurred, and the war was used to pursue pre-existing blood feuds and disputes.

The conflict took a devastating toll on what was then PNG's wealthiest, most orderly province (May, 2004). A seven-year blockade deprived Bougainvilleans of food and pharmaceuticals (Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade [JSCFADT]; 1999). Over 50% of a population of 160,000 were displaced; those who remained in situ were subject to extrajudicial killing, weaponised rape and enforced disappearance (Amnesty International, 1997; Braithwaite, et al., 2010). An estimated 10,000 to 5,000 people died during the war – 1,000 to 2,000 from combat and the remainder from disease or starvation as a result of the blockade (Braithwaite et al., 2010; JSCFADT, 1999).

Multiple attempts were made to resolve the conflict over its duration, but these continually failed to hold. The Burnham talks were two peace negotiations convened by New Zealand foreign minister Don McKinnon at Burnham Military Camp outside Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. Burnham I was held from 5 to 8 July 1997. It included more than 100 participants from the BRA and BRF, as well as traditional, civil society and women leaders (Lees et al., 2015). It produced the Burnham Declaration, a unified, agreed platform from which Bougainvilleans would negotiate peace with Port Moresby. Burnham II was held from 1 to 10 October 1997. It included a reduced Bougainvillean delegation, plus PNG military and political representatives, and a high-level Solomon Islands delegation (Corry, 2002). This produced the Burnham Truce, a breakthrough agreement between the PNG government and the BRA and BRF. The success of the Burnham talks was not simply reflected in the agreements signed at the talks' conclusion, but also in that they held thereafter. Bougainvillean negotiators did not deviate from the declaration's agreed platform at Burnham II, and the truce held through to the signing of the Arawa Agreement ceasefire on 30 April 1998 – the longest formal break in conflict up to that point.

At the heart of the Burnham talks lies a puzzle: how did they produce enduring agreements where earlier attempts had been unable to do so? The most common answer, that the conflict was 'ripe' for resolution, ignores that 'ripeness' had arguably been reached several years earlier.

Some answers make passing mention of indigenous cultural practices as a factor (e.g. Hayes, 2005; Miriori, 2002), though often without substantive investigation. This leaves open some big questions: Were these practices simply cultural window-dressing for political talks? Or should they be seen as an essential factor in the success of the Burnham talks, in creating a circuit breaker in the failed peace process?

What complicates this puzzle is that any success of these cultural practices would challenge conventional negotiation methods and the conflict logic they are built upon.

This chapter explores how and why indigenous cultural practices contributed to the success of the 1997 Burnham talks. I analyse two key diplomatic practices to identify their impact: Melanesian *trautim*<sup>1</sup> and Māori *pōwhiri*. In each case, I explore how the indigeneity of the process imbued its diplomatic function with capacities that contributed to the talks' success where conventional diplomacy could not. Out of this develops an argument that these cultural practices were integral to the talks' success.

Framing these cultural aspects of the Burnham talks as 'indigenous diplomacy' helps us to look beyond seeing a cultural practice as simply a performance, in order to consider the socialised assumptions and recognisable principles in which such cultural practices are embedded. I argue that it is this indigenous diplomatic culture that facilitated a successful interaction between conflicting groups by imbuing the talks with the necessary gravitas and legitimacy for the participants to experience a sense of closure.

## Trautim as an indigenous diplomatic practice

The primary indigenous diplomatic method used at Burnham was *trautim* – a contemporary pan-Bougainvillean practice where parties sit

---

1 Literally 'to vomit something' in Tok Pisin, from *traut* (to vomit, throw out).

together and emotionally vent in extended sessions (Tapi, 2002; Wallis, 2012, 2014). It is similar to prototypical Melanesian conflict resolution practices, where aggrieved parties meet in semi-private negotiations, attended by only those directly involved and nominated facilitators (Boege, 2020; Boege & Garasu, 2011). This negotiation phase is incredibly long, as considerable time is spent working out an agreed account of a conflict's causes and events by consensus (Boege & Garasu, 2011).

Diplomacy is a process for mediating estrangement – managing interactions between groups and the 'otherness' that affects their relationship (Der Derian, 1987; Sharp, 2009). As a diplomatic practice, *trautim* seeks to settle issues that have an alienating and disaffecting impact on intergroup relations. This function is evident around three key features: mediation, information sharing and consensus building.

First, *trautim* mediators bridge the cleavage between groups and facilitate their reconciliation. High-context cultures, such as those of the Pacific, prefer to reconcile conflicts indirectly, with mediators playing a vital role (Augsburger, 1992). The mediators undertake shuttle diplomacy before *trautim* begins, going between parties to organise conditions under which both are willing to begin to reconcile (Boege, 2020; Tanis, 2002). Unlike in conventional diplomacy with its preference for impartiality, Melanesian mediators are close to the groups while not too close to the conflict, which enables them to employ their own connections to the conflicted groups to help facilitate resolution (Boege & Garasu, 2011).

Next, *trautim* has strong information-sharing features to ensure that relationships are restored holistically. All negotiation relies on information sharing to help inform an appropriate solution. This is often strategised in conventional diplomacy, where parties selectively provide details to influence an outcome (Odell & Tingley, 2013). *Trautim* instead favours honest and total disclosure through uninterrupted emotional purging. Though extreme, this method restores intergroup

relations by creating a group understanding of why parties acted as they did. The uninhibited expression by each party gives interlocutors a visceral experience of their grievances, concerns and opinions, which creates the shared understanding needed to rebuild relationships (T. T. Kabutaulaka, personal communication, May 14, 2020).

Finally, *trautim*'s consensus-built outcomes focuses on relationship reconciliation rather than punitive action. Watson-Gegeo and White (1990) explain Melanesian reconciliation as the act of untangling a fishing net. Consensus ensures all parties working to untangle the net agree on how to do so, thus mitigating the risk of straining any one part and tearing lines in the process. In Melanesia, consensus is of such cultural importance that Narokobi (1980) argues it is the only way conflict can be settled in the region. Healing relationships requires *trautim* to be restorative not punitive. Punishment damages instead of restores communal relationships in high-context cultures, so building consensus ensures no one party is put out in reaching settlement (Boege & Garasu, 2011). The Melanesian sociocultural context also does not allow for non-consensual resolution. Minimal social hierarchy means participants, including big-men and traditional leaders, have little capacity to forcibly sanction others (Boege, 2006). By giving parties a *de facto* veto, *trautim* lets them cooperate without fear of their interests being threatened. The absence of threatened interests in consensus-built outcomes creates more durable agreements (Burgess & Spangler, 2003; Donais, 2012; Odell & Tingley, 2013).

## **The impact of *trautim* on the Burnham talks**

With an established understanding of *trautim* and its functions as an indigenous diplomatic practice, we can now focus on its impact at the Burnham talks. *Trautim* at Burnham prioritised personal reconciliation between participants before negotiating the issues of the conflict. Relationship building was the core aim of both Burnham talks. This prioritisation was a considerable change from earlier talks, which

attempted to reconcile parties after agreements had been negotiated. In planning the talks, it was realised that the war had carved substantial divisions among Bougainvilleans, and these needed to be reconciled before discussing the conflict itself (JSCFADT, 1999; Miriori, 2002; Regan, 1998). Significant efforts were made to provide multiple opportunities for participants to reconcile. Excursions to sheep stations and shopping malls, and an open bar for lubricated interactions, all served to provide non-threatening environments in which to reconnect (Hayes, 2005; Henderson, 2007). These were all secondary to *trautim*.

At the talks, *trautim* fostered relationship building through venting, the ritual purging of opinions, experiences and emotions (Wallis, 2012). From a Western understanding, this may seem counterintuitive to reconciliation, even undiplomatic. Yet it helps parties recognise the extent of the impact of wrongdoing and admit guilt, as well as understand what motivated the wrongdoing and forgive (Boege & Garasu, 2011). At several points during the talks, smaller break-out *trautim* sessions were convened to discuss particularly tricky experiences, all with the same aim of reconciling participants (Lees et al., 2015). This continuous cycle of 'purge-guilt-forgive' throughout *trautim* sessions helped to incrementally heal these relationships and slowly bridge divisions.

By engaging emotion head-on, *trautim* also neutralised the destructive impact that emotions can have on conflict negotiations. For the venting participant, this helped 'empty' them emotionally, allowing them to engage with other participants unmotivated by anger or grief (Boege & Garasu, 2011; Lees et al., 2015). Saovana-Spriggs (2007) explains that through the emotional outpouring of others, participants at Burnham developed an empathetic understanding of the position from which each person was negotiating. Addressing interpersonal issues proved important, given the 'high degree of familiarity [among participants of] one another's wartime exploits and individual responsibility for atrocities' (Corry, 2002, p. 113). The flexible speaking opportunities and session lengths that *trautim* allowed gave participants the culturally

required time to rebuild these relationships before addressing political issues (Boege, 2006; Campbell, 2009).

As an indigenous diplomatic practice, *trautim* helped reprioritise the functional aims of the talks in accordance with Melanesian *kastom*. Much of this comes down to reconnecting that is separated in traditional Western conflict resolution. Conventional negotiation, rooted in low-context individualist cultures, favours 'separating people from the problem' (Fisher & Ury, 1981). As an indigenous diplomatic practice, *trautim* reframes these as inherently intertwined, a tangled network of relationships in need of repair rather than as abstract issues (Brigg & Bleiker, 2011; Watson-Gegeo & White, 1990). It also restores emotional expression as a vehicle for negotiation, neutralising destructive impulses<sup>2</sup> and incrementally building a common understanding from which to work (Boege & Garasu, 2011).

Next, *trautim* empowered women to use their new-found social agency to act as mediators, inducing cooperation and securing commitment from participants at Burnham I. In Bougainville, big-men traditionally mediate the negotiation phase of reconciliations (Knauff, 1990); women are usually excluded from this to shield them as landholders from conflict and limit the chances their emotions may impede negotiations (Tanis, 2002). Women instead provided checks and balances over social interactions. During the war many big-men broke free of their customary accountability to women; encouraged by the increase of their authority in the absence of state structures (JSCFADT, 1999; Lees et al., 2015). But this amplification was misinterpreted. The authority of big-men is hyper-localised; attempts to secure buy-in from groups they 'led' but over which they held limited authority constantly failed (Regan, 2008). This was further hindered by the exclusively 'top-brass', non-*kastom* processes

---

2 It is worth noting that psychology literature rejects catharsis (per Breuer and Freud 1895) through venting as a social myth (Bushman, 2002; Parlamis, 2010, 2012). However, as studies have so far not tested beyond Western cultures, their value to our understanding of *trautim* and other non-Western processes is dubious.

through which earlier agreements arose (Boege & Garasu, 2011). By 1997, many key big-men had abandoned their roles as traditional mediators to pursue conventionally Western-style negotiations. Women stepped into this vacuum with impressive impact, using their role as landholders and the social reverence for them as mothers and wives to create new agency. Though the chaos of war dismantled one part of female agency, it created the conditions to forge another.

Trautim provided women the opportunity to employ this agency, with the customary mediatory role enhancing their ability to bridge the cleavages of war. This capacity to work across divides was clear from their arrival at Burnham, where women embraced and greeted one another so warmly that New Zealand Defence Force personnel mistook them as their own faction (Havini, 2004). Women quickly took up the mediating mantle, shuttling between the BRA and BRF factions and acting as intermediaries during the initial days of Burnham I (Lees et al., 2015). It was during trautim sessions that the ability of women to foster cooperation was cemented. They employed their social role as mothers to de-escalate aggression between participants as they purged (Lees et al. 2015; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018b).

At Burnham and subsequent peace talks, these matrilineal obligations served as a 'weapon for peace' to coerce stubborn participants into cooperation (Saovana-Spriggs, 2007, p. 73). Trautim allowed them to use their negotiation skills developed in grassroots peace efforts, with the bravery shown in many of these efforts enhancing their moral authority to mediate (Lees et al., 2015).

The impact of using Melanesian indigenous diplomacy at Burnham reinforces Bagshaw's (2009) claim that the culture that bore the conflict should be the culture used to resolve it. Indeed, Mac Ginty (2008) attributes this realisation to the revitalised interest in indigenous forms of conflict resolution in academia and practice alike. Where conventional methods had struggled to achieve durable results, to use

them again and expect different outcomes would have been to flog the proverbial dead horse. Trautim provided the talks with a method that was designed specifically to respond to the cultural principles and expectations of conflict settlement in Melanesia. As a practice of relationship management, its focus on resolving issues through the reconciliation of people proved what was needed to make substantive, sustainable progress in bringing about peace. Only through indigenous diplomacy was this realignment possible. Despite sharing features with elements of other negotiation practices, this local practice was able to deliver what an equivalent conventional process could not.

### **Pōwhiri: Māori indigenous diplomacy at Burnham**

The other indigenous diplomatic practice featured at Burnham was pōwhiri, a Māori ceremony of encounter by which participants reported being incredibly affected.

#### **The process of pōwhiri**

Pōwhiri is a traditional Māori ceremony of encounter in which one group (*hunga kāinga*) welcomes *manuhiri* (guests) into their space. Its historical role was to ascertain the purpose of a visit and, if peaceful, welcome visitors appropriately (Keane, 2013). The pōwhiri process is underpinned by the concepts of *tapu* and *noa*, which govern much of *tikanga* – the correct way of doing things within Māori culture. Tapu is a state of sacredness that connects something to an atua (supernatural being). Things that are tapu must be dealt with according to tikanga; not doing so carries significant social repercussions (Moorfield, 2011, s.v. ‘tapu’). Noa is the opposite of tapu, a state of normality free from restrictions (Moorfield, 2011, s.v. ‘noa’). For pōwhiri, the encounter and its practices are tapu and must be carried out in a particular tikanga-prescribed way to not violate its sacredness. In doing this, noa can be restored so the groups may undertake what they have met to do (Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006, p. 7).

The ceremony can occur anywhere, but always in a space belonging to the welcoming party. It traditionally occurred on a *marae* – a collection of buildings around a courtyard, forming a forum for social life (Keane, 2013). The weather, level of formality and number of visitors determines the size and structure of pōwhiri, which can range from intimate to comprehensive (Tauroa & Tauroa, 1986).

We can break pōwhiri down into five stages: *karanga*, *whaikōrero* and *waiata*, *koha*, *harirū/hongi*, and *hākari* (Duncan & Rewi, 2018; Keane, 2013). To start, visitors gather at the threshold of the space to which they are being welcomed. The first phase – *karanga* (ceremonial call) – brings them across that threshold and establishes tapu over the encounter. *Kaikaranga* (female callers) conduct call-and-response oratory that identifies the visitors, establishes the purpose of their visit and acknowledges ancestors (Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006, pp. 17–18). The threshold cannot be crossed until the host *kaikaranga* calls the visitors across, as it breaches tikanga and risks violating tapu (Rauawaawa Kaumatua Charitable Trust, 2018). Visitors assemble opposite the hosts with space between them, resembling the traditional layout of pōwhiri on a *marae*.

The second element involves *whaikōrero* (formal speeches) and *waiata* (songs). After an opening *karakia* (ritual chant), *kaikōrero* (orators) from each group deliver eloquent, artistic speeches in Māori. These speeches typically acknowledge the earth, forebears, the living and the purpose of the meeting, and honour the other group (Moorfield, 2011, s.v. ‘whaikōrero’). Speaking order is determined by the protocol of an area’s *iwi* (tribe) but always begins and ends with the hosts (Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006, pp. 26–27). Songs are sung after each speech to demonstrate that the group supports its message. Only men typically speak from the *paepae* (orators’ bench) across the courtyard. While some *iwi* allow women to speak from the *paepae*, it is more common for them to speak from the verandah of the *wharehenui* (meeting house) (Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006, p. 29; Taonui, 2020).

Koha – the third stage – occurs during the last speech from the visitors. The kaikōrero places a gift, often money in an envelope, on the ground between the two groups. It is a practical measure to support the cost of accommodating the visitors and is proportionate to the length of their meetings, which can last from hours to days (Rauawaawa Kaumatua Charitable Trust, 2018). The host's kaikaranga will acknowledge this with a call of thanks (Duncan & Rewi, 2018). This is followed by the fourth stage, harirū (handshaking) and hongī (nose-pressing), where visitors are invited forward to physically greet the hosts. Each visitor shakes hands and hongī with each host, sharing *ha* (the breath of life) in a symbolic act of interconnectedness (Duncan & Rewi, 2018; University of Otago, 2019).

The pōwhiri process concludes with the final phase, hākari – the sharing of food. A karanga will call visitors and hosts into the *wharekai* (dining hall) where food is served relative to the time of day and gathering size. The quality and quantity of food served is considered a reflection of the host's *manaakitanga* (hospitality) and acceptance of their visitors (Duncan & Rewi, 2018; Rauawaawa Kaumatua Charitable Trust, 2018). Food in Māori culture is considered *noa* and its consumption by both parties is *whakanoa*, an act of lifting tapu from participants (Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006). Following this, the pōwhiri process is complete and participants may undertake what they came to do.

There are additional elements that may also occur during pōwhiri. Tradition has evolved so that full pōwhiri, with these additional elements, often occur only for special occasions or high-profile visitors. This is evidence of the adaptation of pōwhiri to become a modern diplomatic practice.

### **Pōwhiri as indigenous diplomatic practice**

The first way in which pōwhiri can be understood as diplomatic practice is as a function of protocol, what Jönsson and Aggestam (2009, p. 83) describe as a 'body of customs governing the procedure and choreography of diplomatic intercourse'.

Pōwhiri provided a standardised custom for the interaction between iwi pre-colonisation. Though the consolidated Māori identity we know today did not emerge until after European contact, many cultural elements were shared across iwi (Irwin, 2017). This includes pōwhiri. A Church Missionary Society account (cited in Keane, 2013) from 22 years after colonisation details pōwhiri as a near identical process to today. This suggests standardisation of pōwhiri is not a result of Western contact and remains a largely unchanged process. Recognisable processes shared across groups to convey meaning and facilitate interaction is a core feature of diplomatic culture (McConnell & Dittmer, 2016). It provides a choreographed process with clear duties and behaviours for both visitors and hosts, underpinned by tikanga to determine pōwhiri as the correct process for encountering others.

The expectations and obligations that define pōwhiri are like modern diplomatic protocol and its requirements of sending and receiving states. It is clear that pōwhiri sat at the centre of an inter-national diplomatic culture before colonisation, setting the standard for interactions between iwi. This is firm evidence of its function as protocol within an indigenous diplomatic system. Though the system it serves has been superimposed by Western state diplomacy, pōwhiri has re-emerged within the culture of this new system.

Pōwhiri are an intrinsic feature of Aotearoa New Zealand's institutional diplomatic culture. There is no clear point at which pōwhiri began to be incorporated into state protocol, although it has been used when receiving members of the British royal family since the start of the 20th century (see Pathé News, 1954; New Zealand National Film Unit, 1952). Its use in state diplomacy traces to the 1980s, when New Zealand began to reframe itself as a Pacific country (Teaiwa, 2012, p. 254). As a result, aspects of Māoritanga, including pōwhiri, featured more regularly in New Zealand diplomacy. This was in full swing by the time of the talks at Burnham in 1997. Nowadays, pōwhiri form an integral element of credential ceremonies for new heads of mission and are

always the first formal activity for visiting heads of state and government (Government House, 2019; New Zealand Government, 2019). Māori from government organisations or a local iwi always lead these pōwhiri, ensuring they remain genuine and authentic practices.

As pōwhiri have become institutionalised as state protocol, additional stages usually left out of everyday encounters have remained integral. Pōwhiri used at *tangihanga* (funerals) or *hui* (meetings) tend to be modest. Elements often excluded from the everyday model – haka pōwhiri (ceremonial welcome dance) and *wero* (challenge of intentions) – remain a core part of diplomatic pōwhiri. They have adapted from their original functions to now act as signs of respect for the *mana* (prestige, authority) of the visitor (Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006). Taking *wero* as an example, its original purpose was to assess visitors' intentions, trying to coax out impure motives by provocation. Armed warriors would meet the visitors afar, perform *pikarikari* – dramatic, intimidating movements – and lay down a *taki* (offering, often a dart, feather or branch). Collecting the dart was a sign of peaceful intentions; refusing it a sign of hostility and a refusal to engage on the hosts' terms (Duncan & Rewi, 2018). In modern protocol, *wero* is reserved for important occasions, performed ceremonially at events of significance or for visiting dignitaries. Alongside these, pōwhiri are infused with Western elements that complement the respect being afforded the visitor. These include guards of honour, anthems and salutes (Government House, 2019).

With these changes, pōwhiri's authenticity and indigeneity may be questioned. Change here is a natural result of two different diplomatic cultures adapting to find commonality (McConnell & Dittmer, 2016). For Māoritanga more specifically, Duncan and Rewi (2018) dismiss the misconception that tikanga and ritual are static and insist it can – and must – change. While disagreement over this exists within Māori society (e.g. Cameron, 2014), traditions such as pōwhiri are largely regarded as living, and therefore adaptable. It is because of these changes, rather than despite them, that it remains distinctly indigenous.

The other way in which pōwhiri can be understood as a diplomatic practice is as a method of conflict reconciliation. Its reconciliation function only appears recently in scholarship (i.e. Blätter & Schubert-McArthur, 2016), but it has long served this purpose. Many Pacific customs that facilitate intergroup engagement, such as pōwhiri, feature conciliatory elements. This reflects the reality of communities coexisting on small islands where avoiding others was impractical and would affect the operation of profoundly interdependent societies. Instead, groups reconcile to restore social order as part of a continual, cyclical conflict management process (Dinnen, 2010). The key to understanding pōwhiri as a method of conflict settlement is its function as a social equaliser. Two of its elements best represent this.

First, the structure of karanga and whaikōrero create a defined, neutral space in which parties can identify and speak to grievances between them. During karanga, the visitors' kaikaranga uses their call to – among other things – inform the hosts of the kaupapa (issue, topic) behind their visit. The host will acknowledge this kaupapa as part of their call and response, and in doing so, bring the visitors into their space (Rauawaawa Kaumatua Charitable Trust, 2018). This process from the start informs both groups of the visitors' motivation and the host's acceptance of it, creating a spiritual commitment to the kaupapa between the groups (Duncan & Rewi, 2018). The open identification of grievances is important for productive conflict negotiation; it sets clear expectations of what will be addressed and agrees to approach it peacefully (Robinson & Robinson, 2005). Karanga is an act of transparency and open-mindedness, which are of high value when negotiating for a sustainable, enduring settlement (Bradley White [NewZcam], 2019). Having established tapu over the encounter, the whaikōrero that follows offers speakers from each side a defined space governed by tikanga in which to explore issues.

Next, many features of pōwhiri act to equalise the relationship between the individuals within the parties. It occurs by treating every person with respect, breaking barriers to interaction, and obliging all parties

to physically connect with one another. During *whaikōrero*, *kaumatua* (elders) may speak directly to the ancestry or characteristics of the other group. In doing this, the *kaumatua* use their own *mana*, earned from their age and community standing, to augment the *mana* of the other party as a sign of great respect (Rauawaawa Kaumatua Charitable Trust, 2018). *Hongi* and *hāriru* are also deep expressions of respect. This comes from sharing *ha*, the breath of life, which connects people together. As it is the first time each group physically connects, *hongi* breaks down any physical barriers to interaction. Where *pōwhiri* acts as a method of conflict reconciliation, *hākari* is the demonstration of its results. Food is a universal equaliser among people; as one does not eat with one's enemies. Eating together psychologically lifts the barriers between people and allows them to interact freely (Essien, 2020, p. 144).

### **The impact of *pōwhiri* on the Burnham talks**

*Pōwhiri* impressed upon Burnham talks participants that these would be different from the outset, and it confronted their intentions and willingness to invest in the process. Just as war-weariness had set in among Bougainvilleans, so too had distrust and apathy among the negotiating parties after multiple failed talks pre-1997 (Lees et al., 2015, p. 6). This negotiation fatigue presented a risk. Participants might divest from or spoil the talks if they felt they were falling into the pattern of earlier negotiations. Considerable efforts were made to avoid this, including hosting the talks in an unseasonably cold, isolated location (Tapi, 2002, p. 26). *Pōwhiri*, however, offered Wellington a convenient vehicle to make clear the talks' difference. Beyond meeting *tikanga* and diplomatic protocol requirements, *pōwhiri* let participants physically experience the difference of these negotiations from the start. This was Wellington's intention. Miriori (2002, pp. 10–11) highlights that officials took directions from Bougainvilleans on the program during planning for Burnham I, but insisted *pōwhiri* be included. Corry (2002, p. 107) confirms this.

Pōwhiri provided such a clear point of difference due to its design as an intentionally confronting experience. Elements of pōwhiri such as wero are deliberately antagonistic and were originally performed to expose visitors' ulterior motives (Duncan & Rewi, 2018; Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006, p. 16). Though wero no longer serves this purpose, it remains an uneasy experience for visitors and can catch off-guard those encountering it for the first time. Because of this, the Burnham talks participants – many of whom were aggrieved by the actions of others present – unwittingly connected with one another through hongi and hāriru. Several accounts confirm that it was unconscious (Hayes, 2005; Tapi, 2002). Hayes recounts that Robert Igara – the PNG delegation head – was taken aback when realising he had pressed noses with people who had fought against his government for seven years. Anecdotal accounts suggest this had a lasting impact on Igara, who carried the taki with him and spoke of the healing power of pōwhiri while on the Bougainville Referendum Commission, 22 years later.

The impact of the pōwhiri on the talks is described as 'walking both sides through the glass walls that separated them' (Hayes, 2005, p. 148). I contend that only pōwhiri, as an indigenous diplomatic practice, could have delivered this. Its confrontational nature breaks down barriers and allows all to genuinely unify under a common peaceful resolve. This was made clear to participants at Burnham I, who were told that to pick up the taki was to signal they had come to Burnham to pursue peace (Lees et al., 2015, p. 9).

Pōwhiri also evoked a common cultural heritage shared by Māori and Pasifika and impressed on participants New Zealand's credentials as a Pacific-minded facilitator. It demonstrated New Zealand's connection to the Pacific, including with Melanesian kastom, through *Māoritanga* (Māori culture). Māori are a Pasifika people. Their forebears arrived in New Zealand from East Polynesia during the 14th century CE in the last of the Austronesian migrations (Walter et al., 2017). These migrations resulted in a shared sociocultural context between many Pacific cultures.

From this shared context, Pasifika customs or practices from one culture can appear familiar to people accustomed with another such culture. The warm connection between kastom and Māoritanga has already been noted.

Furthermore, it impressed upon participants New Zealand's credibility as a Pacific-minded negotiator. Australian attempts to facilitate peace had faltered and bred distrust of Canberra among Bougainvilleans (Regan, 2008). Beyond the appeal of 'not being Australia', Wellington wanted to shake up its reputation as a settler state in favour being recognised as a responsive, culturally Pacific nation. Diplomatic cables (cited in Baird, 2008) detail officials' intentions that the negotiations support this by being run 'the Pacific way'. Understanding this, it is clear how pōwhiri – as an indigenous diplomatic practice of Pacific heritage – reinforced New Zealand's desired identity. Goldsmith (2017) interprets this as almost disingenuous, employing Māoritanga in a trans-Tasman game of one-upmanship in the Pacific region.

I reject this cynicism: no accounts of the talks from any side share Goldsmith's concern. Lees (2015, p. 9) states that the 'government acknowledgement of indigenous custom impressed Bougainvilleans with the genuineness of this approach to negotiations'. Ngāi Tahu iwi kaumatua supported pōwhiri at both talks. It is unlikely the talks would have enjoyed Māori involvement or been perceived as genuine were this insincere politicking. The intentions were genuine, just as were Hayes's (2005) use of Māoritanga to reinforce his Pacific credentials when high commissioner in PNG. This authenticity resulted in an impressive impact.

As pōwhiri require active participation by all visitors and hosts, it is inclusive and allows everyone to experience the process personally. Māoritanga is based around collective responsibility, much like Melanesian kastom, and therefore processes of conciliation such as pōwhiri require inclusive participation (Ministry of Justice, 2001). The

impact of pōwhiri at Burnham came from delegates experiencing this shared cultural context. It impressed upon all of them from the start that their hosts could understand and empathise with their customs due to having similar practices themselves. Corry captures this neatly, saying:

On an island where cultist rumours raged about the agenda of foreign powers (including New Zealand), the link of cultural familiarity and the status accorded to indigenous New Zealanders was clearly striking for the Bougainvillean factions and ... for the representative of the central government in Port Moresby. (2002, p. 115)

This is something that only the use of indigenous diplomacy could have produced. Reitzig (2010, cited in Harding 2016, p. 132) confirms that the 1997 negotiations did better than those facilitated by Australia because pōwhiri demonstrated that New Zealand understood ‘our Melanesian ways’. Conventional techniques are rarely designed to be inclusive of large numbers of negotiators. Those that are only engage the majority passively. None could provide the cultural connection that pōwhiri can.

Finally, pōwhiri demonstrated post-conflict biculturalism. A contributing factor to the Bougainville conflict was the long shadow cast by the artificial ethnic divide created during Anglo-Australian colonisation. While such cleavages were not unusual in PNG, Regan (1998) observes the divide lasted longer and was more intense in Bougainville. A Bougainvillean identity emerged in the 1950s, distinct from imported Papuan labourers. The resulting ethnonationalist identity posed that ‘black skin’ Bougainvilleans could run their own affairs better than ‘red skin’ Papuans in Port Moresby (Adamo, 2018; Nash & Ogan, 1990). The war amplified this division to a point where the peaceful return of Bougainville to within the fold of PNG seemed unlikely. However, the display of respectful biculturalism in a post-conflict society through pōwhiri opened participants’ eyes to the possibility of such a return.

Pōwhiri demonstrated the realistic possibility of bicultural coexistence after protracted conflict. Māori fought outright war against the colonial government for almost three decades, before developing the model of passive resistance that defines their modern relationship (Macduff, 2010). The resulting coexistence after this prolonged conflict captured participants' imaginations. It appears this was an unintended side effect of Wellington trying to assert its Pacific credentials. That both Māori and Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) personnel and officials performed pōwhiri together left a considerable impression (Kaouna, 2001, p.94). Settlers participating in an authentic indigenous diplomatic process, led by indigenous people, is a poignant display of the intercultural respect. It also denies the claims of those who view such indigenous practices as being appropriated by Western practitioners as a form of disingenuous self-validation (Mac Ginty, 2008). This projected an image of New Zealand's post-conflict society that proved lasting (Baird, 2008, pp. 72–73). Due to pōwhiri occurring at the start of the talks, this bicultural image was bought to the fore. It increased participants' awareness of the large number of Māori personnel at the camp. Officials were aware of this and used the awareness and disproportionate number of Māori personnel to buttress the image it created for delegates (Corry, 2002, p. 107). This heightened awareness also meant the later 'study tour' of a marae and discussions of the Māori colonial experience by kaumatua had a heightened impact on participants. Tapi (2002, p. 26) explains that the Māori 'anti-colonial struggle' inspired them and 'bought hope for unity and reconciliation among Bougainvilleans'. Hayes (in Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018a) notes this is also because Bougainvilleans engage differently with Māori than they do with Pākehā, reinforcing the value of indigenous involvement in the negotiation process.

Displays of biculturalism in day-to-day New Zealand society might not be as obvious as those at Burnham. Yet the blatancy that pōwhiri allows – as an indigenous diplomatic practice – makes possible the comprehension

of New Zealand's bicultural model by an outsider. Western visitors may not fully comprehend the importance of this or may reject it and classify it as European 'cultural annihilation' (see Krarup, 2013). But the impact it had at Burnham was unique to the audience and their circumstances. For many participants, pōwhiri was their first encounter of New Zealanders and Māori outside of PNG. It was a visual demonstration of the post-conflict progress. Its impact was poignant:

The Māori culture which the delegates witnessed in the camp and beyond, and New Zealand's bicultural nature, appeared to have a near-transcendent effect. The central place of a 'Pacific' culture in a nation they essentially perceived as European was a striking revelation for the delegates. It appeared to symbolise powerfully a capacity for cultural empathy that they had not expected. It indicated that New Zealand was prepared to treat them with dignity and respect; and at a more fundamental level it reminded them of home. The extent to which this positively informed Bougainvillean attitudes towards New Zealand's role in the peace process was significant. (Corry, 2002, p. 108)

Though it may not have been the intention for its inclusion in the program of the Burnham talks, the use of this indigenous diplomatic practice had considerable impact on participants. Beyond satisfying diplomatic protocol and welcoming visitors to Ngāi Tahu *whenua* (land), pōwhiri broke down decade-long barriers between delegates and forced them to connect genuinely. Its inclusivity saw all participants commit to the negotiations and helped them take their first step towards peace, together. Leading with pōwhiri set more than just the tone for what happened at Burnham. The meaningful use of indigenous diplomacy shaped relations between New Zealanders and Bougainvilleans into the truce-keeping and peacekeeping missions and beyond (Kaouna, 2001; Semoso, 2001). The impact of this one indigenous practice offers a glimpse into how influential settler-state diplomacies could be if rooted in and built around their indigenous peoples. Ihimaera's (1985) vision of foreign policy in which the history of indigenous peoples is valued for its international relevance may be possible yet.

## Conclusion

Turning back to the wider debate on the success of the Burnham talks, this chapter demonstrates that indigenous cultural practices were an integral part of the success of these negotiations. More than window-dressing, their use directly contributed to the endurance of both agreements, the feature to which success is attached when discussing Burnham. The conflict being 'ripe' for resolution receives much of the credit for this. I do not seek to dispute this – conflict ripeness was a necessary if not essential factor in the talks' success. What I dispute is that ripeness alone was sufficient in achieving this. My findings support a broader view of the talks' success, recognising these cultural practices as a necessary component that complements ripeness theory. They cast doubt on whether complex conflict can be settled in a sustainable and durable way without culturally relevant practices, irrespective of its ripeness. Yet when given substantive attention, indigenous diplomacy provides a powerful explanation alongside the ripeness theory of the Burnham talks' success.

## References

- Adamo, A. (2018). A cursed and fragmented island: History and conflict analysis in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29(1), 164–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1404765>
- Amnesty International. (1997, February 26). *Papua New Guinea: Bougainville: The forgotten human rights tragedy* (ASA 34/001/1997). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa34/001/1997/en/>
- Augsburger, D. W. (1992). *Conflict mediation across cultures: Pathways and patterns*. Westminister/John Knox Press. <https://doi.org/10.33196/pm200503016102>

- Bagshaw, D. (2009). Challenging Western constructs of mediation. In D. Bagshaw & E. Porter (Eds.), *Mediation in the Asia-Pacific region: Transforming conflicts and building peace* (pp. 29–46). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876695>
- Baird, R. A. (2008). *ANZAC peacekeeping: Trans-Tasman responses to the Bougainville crisis in 1997 and the subsequent evolution of Australia's and New Zealand's regional peacekeeping* [PhD thesis, University of Canterbury]. UC Research Repository. <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/bc39c06a-f05b-4cba-be8a-51e99f1b3639/content>
- Blätter, A., & Schubert-McArthur, T. (2016). Pōwhiri for the ancestors. Representation of Indigeneity and reconciliation in a Māori ritual. In P. Adds, B. Bönisch-Brednich, R. Hill, & G. Whimp (Eds.), *Reconciliation, representation and indigeneity: 'Biculturalism' in Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 167–182). Universitätsverlag Winter. <https://doi.org/10.33675/978-3-8253-7593-5>
- Boege, V. (2006). *Traditional approaches to conflict transformation — Potentials and limits*. Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. [https://berghof-foundation.org/files/publications/boege\\_handbook.pdf](https://berghof-foundation.org/files/publications/boege_handbook.pdf)
- Boege, V. (2018). Bougainville. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 30(2), 482–492. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2018.0036>
- Boege, V. (2020). Reconciliations (Melanesian style) and transitional justice. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 31(2), 139–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2019.1563776>
- Boege, V., & Garasu, L. (2011). Bougainville: A source of inspiration for conflict resolution. In M. Brigg & R. Bleiker (Eds.), *Mediating across difference* (pp. 163–182). University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824834593.003.0009>

- Bradley White (NewZcam). (2019, July 13). *Break down of the Māori pōwhiri from New Zealand* [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xcp8191\\_6ok](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xcp8191_6ok)
- Braithwaite, J., Charlesworth, H., Reddy, P., & Dunn, L. (2010). *Reconciliation and architectures of commitment: Sequencing peace in Bougainville*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/RAC.09.2010>
- Brigg, M., & Bleiker, R. (2011). Postcolonial conflict resolution. *Mediating across difference: Oceanic and Asian approaches to conflict resolution* (pp. 19–37). University of Hawai'i Press. [doi.org/10.1515/9780824860967-003](https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824860967-003)
- Pathé News. (1954). *The royal tour of New Zealand* [Film]. British Pathé. <https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/75180/>
- Burgess, H., & Spangler, B. (2003). *Consensus building*. Beyond Intractability. [https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/consensus\\_building](https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/consensus_building)
- Bushman, B. J. (2002). Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination, distraction, anger, and aggressive responding. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(6), 724–731. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167202289002>
- Cameron, G. (2014, January 17). Pōwhiri is a reinvented tradition. *First we take Manhattan*. <https://firstwetakemanhattan.org/2014/01/17/powhiri-is-a-reinvented-tradition>
- Campbell, A. (2009). Creative peacebuilding: Experiences from Bougainville. In D. Bagshaw & E. Porter (Eds.), *Meditation in the Asia-Pacific region* (pp. 111–26). Routledge.
- Corry, B. (2002). The Bougainville peace process: The “Pacific” settlement of disputes? In B. Vaughn (Ed.), *The unraveling of island Asia?: Governmental, communal, and regional instability* (pp. 101–117). Bloomsbury Publishing.

- DerDerian, J. (1987). Mediating estrangement: A theory for diplomacy. *Review of International Studies*, 13(2), 91–110.
- Dinnen, S. (2010). Restorative justice in the Pacific Islands: An introduction. In S. Dinnen, A. Jowitt, & T. Newton (Eds.), *A kind of mending: Restorative justice in the Pacific Islands* (pp. 1–34). ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/KM.11.2010>
- Donais, T. (2012). *Peacebuilding and local ownership: Post-conflict consensus-building*. Routledge.
- Duncan, S., & Rewi, P. (2018). Ritual today: Pōwhiri. In M. Reilly, S. Duncan, G. Leoni, L. Paterson, L. Carter, M. Rātima, & P. Rewi (Eds.), *Te kōparapara: An introduction to the Māori world*. Auckland University Press.
- Essien, E. (2020). *Handbook of research on the impact of culture in conflict prevention and peacebuilding*. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-2574-6>
- Fisher, R., & Ury, W. (1981). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. Penguin.
- Goldsmith, M. (2017). Diplomatic rivalries and cultural one-upmanship: New Zealand's long quest to become more Pacific than Australia. *The Round Table*, 106(2), 187–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2017.1296708>
- Government House. (2019). *Credentials ceremonies*. <https://gg.govt.nz/office-governor-general/roles-and-functions-governor-general/constitutional-role/credential-ceremonies>
- Harding, N. (2016). “You’ll bring it, we’ll bring it out”: *Becoming a soldier in the New Zealand Army* [PhD thesis, Massey University]. Massey Research Online. <http://hdl.handle.net/10179/9896>

- Havini, M. T. (2004). The women's voices at Burnham. In J. T. Sirivi & M. T. Havini (Eds.), *As mothers of the land: The birth of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom* (pp. 133–138). Pandanus Books. <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/128828>
- Hayes, J. (2005). Bringing peace to Bougainville. In J. Henderson & G. Watson (Eds.), *Securing a peaceful Pacific* (pp. 140–149). Canterbury University Press.
- Henderson, J. (2007). New Zealand and Oceania. In R. Alley (Ed.), *New Zealand in world affairs IV: 1990–2005* (pp. 232–254). Victoria University Press.
- Ihimaera, W. (1985). New Zealand as a Pacific nation (or 'The hitchhiker's guide to the Pacific'). In H. Gold (Ed.), *New directions in New Zealand foreign policy* (pp. 127–137). Benton Ross.
- Irwin, G. (2017). Pacific migrations. In *Te Ara: The encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/pacific-migrations>
- Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. (1999). *Bougainville: The peace process and beyond* [Committee report]. Commonwealth Parliament, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Jönsson, C., & Aggestam, K. (2009). Diplomacy and conflict resolution. In J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenjuk, & I. W. Zartman (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of conflict resolution* (pp. 33–51). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857024701.n3>
- Kaouna, S. (2001). Freedom from fear. In R. Adams (Ed.), *Peace on Bougainville – Truce Monitoring Group: Gudpela nius bilong peace* (pp. 83–94). Victoria University Press.
- Keane, B. (2013). Te kawa o te marae [Marae protocol]. In *Te Ara: The encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/te-kawa-o-te-marae>

- Knauff, B. M. (1990). Melanesian warfare: A theoretical history. *Oceania*, 60(4), 250–311. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.1990.tb01557.x>
- Krarup, M. (2013, March 6). Aldrig kan et folk forgå, som ikke vil det selv [Never can a people perish that do not want it themselves]. *Berlingske*. <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/aldrig-kan-et-folk-forgaa-som-ikke-vil-det-selv>
- Lees, S., Havini, M. T., Murdock, J., & Vienings, T. (2015). *Bougainville peace agreement: The Burnham I and II dialogues* (J. Namgyal, Ed.). United Nations Development Programme Pacific Centre.
- Macduff, I. (2010). Redemption and resistance: Lessons in non-violent action from early Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Journal of Conflictology*, 1(2), 62–69.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2008). Indigenous peace-making versus the liberal peace. *Conflict and Cooperation*, 43(2), 139–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836708089080>
- Matenga-Kohu, J., & Roberts, J. (2006). *Pōwhiri: Rituals of encounter* (K. Quin, Illus.; M. Love, Ed). Wotz Wot.
- May, R. J. (2004). *State and society in Papua New Guinea: The first twenty-five years* (2nd ed.). ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/SSPNG.05.2004>
- McConnell, F., & Dittmer, J. (2016). Diplomatic culture. In C. Constantinou, P. Kerr, & P. Sharp (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of diplomacy* (pp. 104–113). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957930.n9>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2018a, October 18). *MFAT 75th Anniversary Conference: New Zealand's Pacific story* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ad773BRGKjE>

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2018b, November 2). *Bougainville - A risky assignment* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8jA1BFQYpk>
- Ministry of Justice. (2001). *He hīnāture ki te ao māori: Māori perspectives on justice* [Report]. New Zealand Government.
- Miriori, M. (2002). *A Bougainville Interim Government perspective on early peace efforts*. Conciliation Resources. <https://www.c-r.org/accord/papua-new-guinea%E2%80%933bougainville/bougainville-interim-government-perspective-early-peace>
- Momis, J. L. (2006, June 28). *Mediating peace and autonomy through consultation and consensus: The Bougainville experience* [Keynote address]. 3rd Asia Pacific Mediation Forum Conference, Suva. <http://www.asiapacificmediationforum.org/resources/2006/momis.pdf>
- Moorfield, J. (2011). *The Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori dictionary* (3rd ed.). Pearson New Zealand.
- Narokobi, B. (1980). *The Melanesian way* (H. Olela, Ed.). Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.
- Nash, J., & Ogan, E. (1990). The red and the black: Bougainvillean perceptions of other Papua New Guineans. *Pacific Studies*, 13(2), 1–18.
- New Zealand Government. (2019). *Operational Policy Guidelines*. Department of Internal Affairs. <https://www.dia.govt.nz/Visits-and-Ceremonial-Office---Operational-Policy-Guidelines>
- New Zealand National Film Unit. (1952). *Royal Tour 1927* [Short film]. M. Forlong (Ed.). New Zealand Government. <https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/royal-tour-1927-1952>

- Odell, J., & Dustin, T. (2013). Negotiating agreements in international relations. In J. Mansbridge & C. J. Martin (Eds.), *Negotiating agreement in politics* (pp. 144–182). American Political Science Association.
- Parlami, J. (2010). *Venting anger: Third party targets and responses. Organization, Leadership, and Communications*. Paper 4. <https://repository.usfca.edu/olc/4/>
- Parlami, J. (2012). Venting as emotion regulation: The influence of venting responses and respondent identity on anger and emotional tone. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 23(1), 77–96. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10444061211199322>
- Rauawaawa Kaumatua Charitable Trust. (2018, March 8). *Pōwhiri - Tikanga series of videos* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gclm6uQHxPU>
- Regan, A. (1998). Causes and course of the Bougainville conflict. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 33(3), 269–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223349808572878>
- Regan, A. (2008). The Bougainville intervention: Political legitimacy and sustainable peace building. In G. Fry & T. T. Kabutaulaka (Eds.), *Intervention and state-building in the Pacific: The legitimacy of 'cooperative intervention'* (pp. 184–208). Manchester University Press.
- Robinson, D., & Robinson, K. (2005). *Pacific ways of talk: Hui and talanoa* (Working Paper No. 36). Social and Civic Policy Institute.
- Saovana-Spriggs, R. V. (2007). *Gender and peace: Bougainvillean women, matriliney, and the peace process* [PhD thesis, Australian National University]. <https://doi.org/10.25911/5d76395eafb11>

- Semoso, F. (2001). We needed peace too. In R. Adams (Ed.), *Peace on Bougainville – Truce Monitoring Group: Gudpela nius bilong peace* (pp. 95–100). Victoria University Press.
- Sharp, P. (2009). *Diplomatic theory of international relations*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511805196>
- Tanis, J. (2002). Reconciliation: My side of the island. *Accord*, 12, 58–61.
- Taonui, R. (2020, March 13). *The argument for Māori women speaking on the marae*. The Spinoff. <https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/13-03-2020/the-argument-for-maori-women-speaking-on-the-marae>
- Tapi, R. (2002). From Burnham to Buin: Sowing the seeds of peace in the land of the snow-capped mountains. *Accord*, 12, 24–27.
- Tate, H. (1990). The unseen world. *New Zealand Geographic*, 5. <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/the-unseen-world/>
- Tauroa, H., & Tauroa, P. (1986). *Tē marae: A guide to customs and protocol*. Reed Methuen.
- Teaiwa, T. (2012). Good neighbour, big brother, kin: New Zealand's foreign policy in the contemporary Pacific. In S. Mallon, K. Māhina-Tuai, & D. Salesa (Eds.), *Le tangata o le moana: New Zealand and the people of the Pacific*. Te Papa Press.
- University of Otago. (2019). *Pōwhiri: Māori ki te Whare Wānanga o Ōtākou* [Pōwhiri: Māori at the University of Otago]. <https://www.otago.ac.nz/maori/world/tikanga/powhiri>
- Wallis, J. (2012). Building a liberal-local hybrid peace and state in Bougainville. *The Pacific Review*, 25(5), 613–635. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2012.728242>

Walter, R., Buckley, H., Jacomb, C., & Matisoo-Smith, E. (2017). Mass migration and the Polynesian settlement of New Zealand. *Journal of World Prehistory*, 30, 351–376. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10963-017-9110-y>

Watson-Gegeo, K. A., & White, G. (1990). *Disentangling: Conflict discourse in Pacific societies*. Stanford University Press.

# 16

## **The evolution of the Samoan ifoga: From kinship ritual to diplomatic practice**

TUALA SAUI'A LOUISE MATAIA MILO

In 2002, during a formal apology from the New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark to the people of Samoa, the Government of Samoa gifted a fine mat, 'Le Ageagea o Tumua', in return. Only a few understood the weight of this exchange, and of the *ifoga* ceremony (Samoan traditional ritual of apology and reconciliation) of which it was part. To Western eyes, it was a symbolic gesture, but for the Samoans, it was an integral part of a sophisticated system of relational diplomacy refined over centuries. The persistent notion that diplomacy is a foreign concept introduced to Oceania fails to recognise the rich tradition of diplomatic practices embedded within indigenous cultures across the Pacific.

This chapter argues that the Samoan ifoga ritual serves as a critical case study for understanding Oceanic diplomacy, challenging Western-centric views by illustrating how indigenous practices have

evolved into a multifaceted tool for conflict resolution, national politics and international relations. By exploring the historical and contemporary applications of the ifoga, this analysis aims to contribute to the decolonisation of diplomatic studies through the recognition of indigenous diplomatic practices in the Pacific region, and beyond. As Huffer and Qalo (2004) argue, 'the emergence and affirmation of Pacific philosophies is a necessary corrective to the long-standing marginalisation of indigenous ways of thinking in both academic and policy contexts'.

In an increasingly globalised world, the dynamics of diplomacy are more crucial than ever. As international interactions intensify and blur national boundaries, maintaining peace, safeguarding human rights and fostering cross-cultural understanding becomes paramount. However, conventional understandings of diplomacy, often rooted in Western state-centric models, fall short in addressing the complexities of postcolonial contexts. This is where understanding indigenous diplomatic practices such as the Samoan ifoga becomes particularly significant.

The ifoga offers a unique lens through which to examine the nuances of diplomacy beyond formal governmental interactions. By studying the ifoga, we can gain insights into how cultural values, relationality and community involvement shape diplomatic processes in Oceanic societies. Moreover, understanding the ifoga's evolution and adaptation in response to globalisation and postcolonialism can provide valuable lessons for promoting more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to conflict resolution and international relations. This contribution is in line with Huffer and Qalo's (2004) argument on the significance and under-explored depth of Pacific indigenous knowledge.

This exploration is structured around five key questions, each focusing on a distinct aspect of the ritual's significance and its implication for understanding diplomacy in both a modern and traditional Oceanic setting. The first question seeks to examine the ifoga ritual as a traditional

diplomatic practice in its historical and cultural context. The second is concerned with how and why the ifoga has evolved in the postcolonial period in Samoa, and in the Samoan diaspora. The third examines how has it been adopted and deployed in interstate diplomacy – specifically by successive New Zealand governments in their diplomatic relations with the Samoan government and Samoan community. The fourth question asks what are the Oceanic diplomatic principles underlying these contemporary ifoga practices, and how do they contrast with Western ideas of diplomacy? What implications does this practice therefore have for enhancing modern diplomatic efforts and addressing global challenges? Finally, the fifth question asks what ethical concerns are raised by deploying the ifoga in regional and global diplomacy? When is it legitimate?

### **The ifoga ritual: Historical and cultural context**

The ifoga is deeply rooted in the concept of *Vā fealoa'i* (relationality), emphasising the interconnectedness of individuals within the community and their collective bond with the spiritual realm. Far from being merely a public display of self-humiliation, this ritual represents a profound commitment to restoring balance and order through a ceremonial act steeped in the spiritual and diplomatic traditions of ancient Samoan society.

The term 'ifoga' originates from the word 'ifo', meaning 'to bow down' in a manner similar to those defeated in battle, symbolising complete submission. Filoiali'i and Knowles (1983, p. 384) aptly define ifoga as 'the traditional practice of seeking forgiveness and rendering a formal apology resulting from a hostile event involving physical injury and/or the verbal degrading of a family reputation.'

The ritual, which traditionally begins before dawn, has several key elements. First there is the physical submission, with the high chief of the perpetrator's family arriving at the victim's home. Covered in *'ie toga*

(fine mats), the chief kneels outside, symbolising complete submission and remorse. The victim's family, upon accepting the ifoga, removes the mat covering the guilty party, signifying their willingness to forgive and marking the beginning of the reconciliation process. The offending party presents valuable gifts, typically including *'ie toga*, food items such as corned beef and monetary offerings. These gifts serve as a tangible expression of remorse and a means to compensate for the harm caused. The ifoga culminates in a communal meal, symbolising restored harmony and the healing of community bonds. By breaking bread together, both parties demonstrate their commitment to moving forward in peace and unity.

The essence of the ritual is in the diplomatic oration. Skilled *tulafale* (orators) deliver solemn and diplomatic speeches, employing poetic metaphors to convey deep remorse and plead for forgiveness. These carefully crafted orations are crucial in soothing the pain of the affected families and facilitating reconciliation. One particular example of such an oration goes:

*Tulouna le sau i le totogo o malama*

(Pardon the breath of dawn) [this evokes a sense of new beginnings].

*Tulouna le sau i le sosoli ata*

(Pardon the ardent breath of noon)  
[this conveys a sense of the weight of one's shadow/  
responsibility and the sun's high position].

*Tulouna le sau i le ula o le afi i Fagamalama*

(Pardon the scent of the twilight's scent of the sparks of the evening fires).

*Tulouna le manamea na pa'ilagi ai la'u manava*

(Pardon this endearing bond that causes my breath to touch the heavens).

The power and effectiveness of the ifoga ritual lies in its combination of physical submission, diplomatic oration, gift exchange and a shared meal. Together, these elements create a comprehensive mechanism for conflict resolution and social healing that has been central to Samoan culture for generations. The importance of the orations cannot be overstated. They are not merely formal speeches but are imbued with cultural significance and spiritual power. The words chosen and the manner in which they are delivered can make the difference between acceptance and rejection of the ifoga, ultimately determining whether peace and harmony can be restored to the community.

In essence, the ifoga ritual serves as a powerful testament to the Samoan commitment to community harmony, forgiveness and the restoration of relationships, making it a unique and effective approach to conflict resolution in Polynesian culture.

## **Evolution of the ifoga in contemporary Samoa and in the diaspora**

In the early hours of a January morning, the village of Afega witnessed a powerful demonstration of Samoan cultural resilience. Following a tragic New Year's Eve double shooting, families gathered for an ifoga ceremony. This solemn event, where the perpetrator's family sought reconciliation through symbolic submission and gift-giving, exemplifies the enduring relevance of ancient Samoan customs in addressing modern conflicts.

The Afega ceremony is not an isolated case. Recent years have seen an increase in ifoga ceremonies across Samoa and its diaspora communities, often in response to personal conflicts and misunderstandings. This resurgence highlights the ritual's adaptability and its crucial role in keeping social harmony in contemporary Samoan society.

FIGURE 23: A FALELATAI FAMILY PERFORMS AN IFOGA TO THE VILLAGE OF AFEGA AFTER A SHOOTING INCIDENT THAT RESULTED IN TWO DEATHS.



*Photographs by Maina Vai, Samoa Global News*

FIGURE 24: THE PARAMOUNT CHIEF OF ONE OF THE VICTIM'S FAMILY AND HIS WIFE COME OUT TO REMOVE THE 'IE TOGA, SIGNIFYING THE FAMILY'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE IFOGA.



*Photographs by Maina Vai, Samoa Global News*

The ifoga ritual remains a vital method for achieving reconciliation in modern Samoa, especially in situations demanding swift, clear and public measures to avoid further conflict. Its enduring relevance can be attributed to several factors driving social change. The custom is deeply rooted in the concept of *Vāfealoa'i* (relationality) and represents more than just a public display of remorse. It embodies a profound

commitment to restoring balance and order through a ceremonial act steeped in spiritual and diplomatic traditions. As Samoan communities face new challenges in a rapidly changing world, the ifoga continues to evolve, bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern conflict resolution.

This enduring relevance of the ifoga is attributed to several factors driving social change, including shifts in societal norms, the impact of migration, and the formal acknowledgment of traditional practices within Samoan laws. These developments have helped the ifoga evolve over time, ensuring its continued importance in Samoan culture as a means to mend relationships and keep social harmony.

### **The migration/diaspora factor**

Migration has been the most significant driver in the evolution of ifoga. Since the end of World War II, there has been a steady increase in Samoan migration to countries such as the United States, New Zealand and Australia (Franco, 2008; Mataia, 2016). As Samoans have moved to other societies, they have brought their worldviews and practices with them, adapting the ifoga to new contexts. A powerful example of this adaptation is the case of Geo Sione, who was killed by his partner in Australia. In response to the murder, the partner's family performed an ifoga for Sione's family in Auckland, New Zealand, demonstrating the ritual's ability to transcend national borders (Enari, 2021). This occurrence highlights how the ifoga has evolved to address conflicts within the Samoan diaspora communities.

The practice of ifoga in these kinds of new settings has led to its recognition and integration into various cultural and legal contexts. For instance, there are connections between the Samoan ifoga and Aboriginal cultural healing processes, illustrating how different communities can find common ground in reconciliation practices. Social media and news outlets have reported numerous instances of ifoga being used to resolve conflicts within Samoan enclaves abroad.

The adaptability of the ifoga has allowed it to remain relevant and meaningful in contemporary Samoan society, both at home and abroad. This evolution has created a demand for understanding the ritual and incorporating it into legal systems outside of Samoa, particularly in countries with significant Samoan populations such as New Zealand. European-based legal systems have begun to explore the ifoga as a pathway for restorative justice. A notable example of this interest is the demonstration of the ifoga to New Zealand judiciary members in the village of Vaimoso, showcasing the ritual's potential role in formal legal processes (Keresoma, 2023).

The recognition and incorporation of traditional practices within Samoan legislation has formalised aspects of the ifoga ritual, potentially altering its execution and the consequences of the ritual. This legal recognition can lead to a blending of traditional and modern legal systems, influencing how reconciliation and atonement are approached within the Samoan community. The ifoga has been incorporated into Samoa's legal system as a culturally significant practice that complements formal legal processes. For instance, in *Police v Ausage* (2007), the accused's family performed an ifoga that was accepted by the victim's family. The offerings included 60 boxes of herrings, one cattle beast, two large pigs, 10 large fine mats and a monetary sum of WST 2,000 (*Police v Ausage*, 2007). This demonstrates how the practice of ifoga is viewed as a significant act of atonement within the community.

The ifoga is recognised in the context of sentencing and dispute resolution, reflecting the importance of cultural traditions in the Samoan approach to justice and community harmony. The Village Fono Act, section 8, allows the court to take into account the ifoga at sentencing as a mitigating factor (Village Fono Act 1991). The Court of Appeal case of *Attorney General v Godinet* (2011) was a turning point; the court granted a deduction of 12 months in sentencing for an ifoga by virtue of section 8 of the Village Fono Act (*Attorney General v Godinet*, 2011). This shows that the law is not one-sided. The case of *Police v Ausage* further exemplifies this, where the accused, initially charged with murder,

pleaded guilty to manslaughter. While the judgement details several mitigating factors, including his guilty plea, cooperation with the police and the absence of premeditation, the performance and acceptance of the ifoga undoubtedly played a role in the overall consideration of his sentence. As one practicing judge stated:

The Ifoga, before it was legislated, it was always recognized in all facets of our lives, including courts ... Whether it's legislated or not, it does not give it any less recognition or relevance as it remains an integral part of our justice system at the national and communal level ... but having it legislated does strengthen its status and obligates the court to take it into account; it is even more appropriate and helpful for our people in New Zealand to have culturally appropriate forms of justice.

The Ausage case underscores this sentiment, showing how deeply ingrained the practice is within the Samoan justice system.

## **The influence of Christianity**

The evolution of the ifoga ritual in Samoan society reflects the complex interplay between tradition, modernisation and religious influence. This transformation is particularly evident in the context of changing societal norms, the impact of globalisation, and the increasing role of Christianity in Samoan culture. Macpherson and Macpherson (2000) argue that as societal attitudes evolve, so do the expectations and etiquette surrounding traditional rituals. This evolution is exemplified in the 2021 political crisis in Samoa, where the ifoga was employed in a novel context, demonstrating its adaptability to contemporary sociopolitical issues.

The influence of Christianity, particularly Catholicism, has been profound in shaping the moral framework within which ifoga is

understood and practiced. Latavai (2018) notes that religious beliefs have led to the integration of Christian elements into traditional rituals. This integration was further legitimised by the Second Vatican Council's decree on inculturation, which encouraged the incorporation of indigenous practices into Catholic liturgy (O'Malley, 2008).

The 2021 political crisis in Samoa provides a striking example of this synthesis, where Archbishop Alapati Lui Mataeliga performed an ifoga at the seat of government in Mulinu'u, blending traditional Samoan custom with his role as a Catholic leader. This event serves as a pertinent study of these intersecting influences. The archbishop's use of ifoga in this context signifies the church's evolving role as a mediator and peacemaker in Samoan society. This act underscores the church's attempt to connect with the cultural identity of the people while addressing contemporary issues, highlighting the deep integration of faith and culture in Samoan society (Retzlaff, 2021). However, this use of ifoga in a national political context raises important questions about its effectiveness in addressing modern crises and the appropriateness of religious leaders' direct involvement in political matters. It also reflects the ongoing negotiation between traditional practices and contemporary realities in Samoan society.

### **Transition of ifoga to a diplomatic practice of the state**

Two case studies that illustrate the ifoga's transition from a community-based ritual to a tool for national politics and diplomacy, as well as its significance within transnational and diasporic Samoan communities, are two public apologies by the government of New Zealand. They demonstrate the ifoga's evolving function as a bridge between the past and the present, and its potential to shape Samoa's future on the world stage.

**Prime Minister Helen Clark's apology (2002)**

In 2002, Helen Clark, then Prime Minister of New Zealand, issued a formal apology to the people of Samoa. This apology was delivered during the 40th anniversary of Samoa's independence, acknowledging the historical injustices inflicted upon the Samoan people during New Zealand's colonial administration. The apology specifically addressed several key events, the first of which was the 1918 influenza epidemic that was mishandled by the New Zealand administration and resulted in the deaths of about 22 per cent of Samoa's population. This event was deemed preventable at the time but is described as one of the worst epidemics recorded globally (WHO). The second event the apology covered was the 1929 shooting of nonviolent protesters, resulting in the death of about nine people, including Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, and the injury of 50 others. (Field, 1991, 2006; Meleisea & Schoeffel, 1989). The third event targeted by Clark's apology was the banishment of Samoan leaders and the removal of chiefly titles, which was seen by the Samoan people as interference with the fundamentals of Fa'a Samoa (Samoan way of life).

Helen Clark's apology was a gesture aimed at reconciliation, expressing sorrow and regret for the injustices done during the New Zealand colonial administration of Samoa, and she hoped that the apology would enable New Zealand and Samoa to build an even stronger relationship and friendship for the future, emphasising the mutual respect between the two nations. While not a traditional ifoga in its entirety, Clark's use of the Samoan cultural protocols demonstrated respect for Samoan traditions and acknowledged their significance in the reconciliation process.

In response to the apology, Samoa gifted the people of New Zealand the Le Ageagea o Tumua fine mat, symbolising love, death, remorse and forgiveness between kin. This gesture marked the symbolic end of a difficult chapter and was warmly embraced by both governments,

highlighting the strength and the multifaceted nature of the relationship between New Zealand and Samoa. However, the apology was received with mixed emotions among Samoans, and as a result, many in the community looked for concrete follow up actions from the New Zealand government – such as sustained policy changes or direct community support – to show that the apology would lead to lasting positive change, prompting most local Samoans to wonder about what the next actions might be.

### **Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's 2021 ifoga ceremony**

The most recent and perhaps most striking example of ifoga in modern diplomacy occurred in August 2021, when New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern participated in a formal ifoga ceremony to apologise for the 'Dawn Raids' of the 1970s. These raids targeted Pacific Island communities in New Zealand, resulting in deportations and family separations. Ardern's participation in the full ifoga ritual, including being covered with a fine mat, marked an unprecedented incorporation of this Samoan practice into state-level diplomacy.

The adaptation of ifoga for this purpose reflects a growing recognition of the value of indigenous diplomatic practices in addressing complex historical and cultural issues. As Aupito William Sio, Minister for Pacific Peoples, stated during the special parliamentary debate, 'I used symbolism to try and convey a very strong message to the next generation of Pacific peoples, one of the fastest-growing populations in Aotearoa' (New Zealand Parliament, 2021, p. 2). This approach acknowledges the importance of cultural context in diplomatic engagements, particularly in regions with strong indigenous traditions.

The use of the ifoga in this context has been met with mixed reactions. While many view it as a powerful gesture of reconciliation, others have expressed concerns about potential cultural appropriation or the risk of diluting the practice's cultural significance. As Māori member

of parliament Rawiri Waititi of Te Pāti Māori noted, ‘We, as tangata whenua [people of the land], were robbed of the opportunity to manaaki our tangata moana whanaunga [care for our people of the sea, our relatives], and that is absolutely devastating’ (Waititi, 2021, pp. 6–7). This highlights the complex interplay between indigenous practices and state-level diplomacy.

## **Oceanic diplomacy principles**

The presence of three principles that form the cornerstone of Oceanic diplomatic practices – reciprocity, relationality and community acceptance – is imperative for the effective functioning of rituals such as the ifoga. The ifoga showcases the reciprocal nature of apology and forgiveness, the relational focus that prioritises collective harmony over individual interests, and the community’s role in understanding and accepting the reconciliation process. This holistic approach distinguishes Oceanic diplomacy from Western diplomatic models and highlights its effectiveness in addressing complex social and political issues within the Pacific. By recognising the indispensable nature of these principles, we can better appreciate the depth and sophistication of Oceanic Diplomacy as a framework for navigating interpersonal and intercommunity relations in the Pacific region.

Relationality forms the cornerstone of Oceanic diplomacy, emphasising the interconnectedness of Pacific communities and prioritising collective identity over individualistic approaches. The ifoga exemplifies relationality by bringing together offending and offended parties, along with families and community leaders to collectively restore harmony and repair damaged relationships. Other cultures of the Pacific have similar rituals. An example of this is the Fijian *boka* that was performed by Fiji’s Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka to mend the Pacific Island Forum’s relationship with the Micronesian leaders in 2022, when they felt marginalised by a Pacific Forum decision on leadership and threatened to leave the Forum. The Fijian apology was successful and

the Micronesian island states returned to the ‘family’, reaffirming Pacific solidarity (Fry & Tarte, 2025).

Cultural protocols play an integral role in Oceanic diplomatic processes, as evidenced by the specific rituals and use of traditional objects in ceremonies such as the ifoga. The offending party’s willingness to humble themselves is significant. This is an act of remorse, and to cover oneself in the most prized possession in ancient Samoa – the *‘ie toga* (fine mat) – embodies the importance of cultural protocols and values of reciprocity and respect to facilitate apology and reconciliation. Moreover, this tradition has a spiritual dimension to it. The ifoga often involves religious elements communicated by the oration of contrition that follows when the offended party lifts the fine mat, signally they have been pardoned – adding a sacred aspect to the reconciliation process, making it a respected and trusted method of conflict resolution.

Collective decision-making is a crucial element of Oceanic diplomacy, involving various stakeholders and reflecting the communal nature of Pacific societies. The ifoga involves chiefs and other community leaders in the reconciliation process, showcasing the collective nature of decision-making in Oceanic diplomatic practices. What is emphasised is the collective responsibility of both the offence and its resolution, thus reinforcing its validity and permanence. This inclusive approach reflects the communal nature of Pacific societies and their diplomatic practices at the different levels of societies (Hau’ofa, 1994).

The focus on restorative justice, rather than punitive measures, is a hallmark of Oceanic diplomacy. The ifoga ceremony prioritises healing and reconciliation over punishment, as evidenced by its focus on restoring relationships and community harmony. It is a constructive alternative to retaliatory violence and avoids escalation of conflicts. The focus is on healing relationships and restoring harmony rather than punishment, aligning with traditional values.

Symbolic actions and culturally significant gestures are essential components of Oceanic diplomatic practices, conveying deep meaning and facilitating understanding between parties. The act of covering oneself with a mat and its subsequent removal by the offended party in the ifoga ritual symbolises humility, apology and forgiveness, demonstrating the power of symbolic actions in Oceanic diplomacy.

The adaptability of Oceanic diplomacy is demonstrated by the evolution of traditional practices to address modern diplomatic challenges and contexts. The performance of ifoga now has legal recognition. In some cases, the performance of ifoga is considered in formal legal proceedings, showing its continued relevance. The ifoga's transformation from a family/village-based practice to a tool for interstate apology through a cross-cultural application, as seen in New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's use of the ceremony, illustrates its adaptability to modern diplomatic contexts.

### **Implications for use in modern diplomacy**

By embodying these elements, the ifoga ceremony not only exemplifies the Oceanic diplomacy framework but also offers a compelling alternative to conventional Western diplomatic approaches. It highlights the effectiveness of culturally rooted, relationship-focused methods in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace within and between Pacific communities. As Greg Fry and other scholars have argued, recognising and incorporating these indigenous diplomatic practices can enrich our understanding of international relations and offer new pathways for conflict resolution in an increasingly interconnected world (Fry & Tarte, 2015, 2025)

The effectiveness of the ifoga as a diplomatic tool in this context remains a subject of debate. While it has been praised for its symbolic power and cultural sensitivity, some critics argue that such applications risk using cultural practices as symbolic gestures without substantive

policy changes (Fiu Kolia & Mawson, 2024). Despite these concerns, the use of the ifoga in this context represents a significant evolution of the practice, bridging cultural traditions with international diplomacy. It demonstrates the potential for indigenous diplomatic practices to facilitate meaningful reconciliation and relationship-building between nations, particularly in postcolonial contexts. The adaptation of the ifoga for use in state-level apologies also raises important questions about the decolonisation of diplomatic practices. By incorporating indigenous rituals into formal government processes, New Zealand is challenging conventional Western diplomatic norms and acknowledging the value of culturally specific approaches to conflict resolution and reconciliation. This shift towards more inclusive diplomatic practices could potentially lead to more effective and culturally sensitive approaches to addressing historical grievances and fostering international cooperation. From my perspective, it is reinvigorating ancient Pacific channels to address contemporary issues in modern power structures – something that is beyond Western models.

The incorporation of the ifoga into modern diplomatic contexts, particularly by the New Zealand Government, represents a significant evolution in international diplomacy and reconciliation efforts. The adaptation of ifoga for diplomatic purposes presents both opportunities and challenges. While it demonstrates a commitment to cultural sensitivity and restorative justice, there are risks of misappropriation or superficial application without genuine reconciliation efforts. The practice's expanded scope, from local Samoan communities to national and international stages, adds complexity to its reception and impact across diverse cultural contexts. Critics express concerns about potential cultural dilution and the risk of reducing ifoga to a symbolic gesture devoid of substantive policy changes. However, in my view at least, the ifoga sets a new standard for addressing historical injustices using culturally appropriate methods.

The Samoan ifoga ceremony challenges the dominance of Western diplomatic frameworks. For instance, while Western diplomacy often focuses on state-to-state interactions, ifoga involves entire communities in the reconciliation process, as seen in its application to resolve conflicts between Samoan villages. This broader community involvement demonstrates the potential for more inclusive and culturally rooted diplomatic practices. Such alternative approaches pave the way for a more diverse understanding of global diplomacy.

The Ifoga, as previously mentioned, prioritises restoration and healing over punishment in conflict resolution. A notable example is the use of ifoga in Samoan courts, where it can be considered as a mitigating factor in sentencing, emphasising reconciliation rather than solely focusing on punitive justice. This restorative approach offers valuable insights into alternative methods of addressing wrongdoings and maintaining social harmony. The contrast between ifoga and Western legal systems highlights the need for more nuanced approaches to justice and conflict resolution.

Recognising practices such as the ifoga expands our understanding of what constitutes effective diplomacy. The ceremony's use in contemporary Samoan politics, such as in resolving disputes between political parties, illustrates how traditional practices can address modern challenges. This integration of cultural traditions into current diplomatic efforts underscores the importance of diverse approaches in global relations. By acknowledging these varied diplomatic methods, we can develop more culturally sensitive and effective international relations strategies.

It encourages a more pluralistic view of diplomatic engagement, recognising that effective diplomacy can take many forms beyond the confines of formal state-to-state interactions. The incorporation of ifoga into contemporary diplomatic contexts, such as New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's use of the ceremony to apologise for historical injustices against Pacific Islanders, demonstrates the potential for

Indigenous Diplomacy to address complex historical and cultural issues in ways that conventional diplomacy might struggle to achieve.

Moreover, the recognition of ifoga and similar Indigenous Diplomacy challenges the notion of a universal, one-size-fits-all approach to diplomacy. It underscores the importance of cultural context and local knowledge in diplomatic engagements, particularly in regions with strong indigenous traditions. This recognition can lead to more effective and culturally sensitive diplomatic efforts, especially in conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives in diverse cultural settings.

The study of ifoga also highlights the potential for Indigenous Diplomacy and related practices to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining their cultural integrity. The ceremony's continued relevance in modern Samoan society, including its application in legal contexts and international relations, demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of indigenous diplomatic traditions. This adaptability offers valuable lessons for the field of diplomatic studies, encouraging scholars and practitioners to consider how traditional practices can be meaningfully integrated into contemporary global diplomacy.

## **Ethical considerations**

The incorporation of traditional practices such as the ifoga into modern diplomatic contexts nevertheless raises important ethical and legitimacy-related questions. While such practices offer opportunities to acknowledge and respect indigenous customs, they also present challenges in ensuring their appropriate use in cross-cultural settings. The ethical implications revolve around balancing genuine cultural recognition with the risk of tokenism or cultural appropriation, as well as navigating power dynamics in diplomatic interactions.

The legitimacy of using ifoga as a diplomatic tool varies across stakeholders, with some viewing it as a meaningful validation of indigenous traditions and others questioning its compatibility with established diplomatic

norms. These complexities highlight both the potential benefits and challenges of integrating culturally specific rituals such as the ifoga into contemporary international relations. The use of ifoga by New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in 2021 to apologise for historical injustices against Pacific Islanders demonstrates a willingness to engage with indigenous customs and acknowledge past wrongs. This approach can foster greater understanding and trust between nations, particularly in postcolonial contexts where historical grievances often linger. However, the ethical challenge lies in ensuring that such practices are not merely tokenistic gestures or superficial attempts at cultural sensitivity. There is a risk that the deep cultural significance of ifoga could be diluted or misrepresented when it is transplanted into a foreign diplomatic setting, potentially trivialising the ritual's importance to Samoan culture.

The different ways various stakeholders perceive the legitimacy of the ifoga as a diplomatic tool reflect the complex nature of cross-cultural diplomacy. For Samoan communities and other Pacific Islanders, the use of ifoga in international relations may be seen as a validation of their cultural practices and a step towards decolonising diplomatic norms. This perspective aligns with the broader concept of 'Oceanic diplomacy', which emphasises the importance of indigenous diplomatic practices in the Pacific region. Conversely, some Western diplomats and policymakers may question the legitimacy of incorporating such rituals into formal state diplomacy, viewing them as incompatible with established diplomatic protocols or potentially compromising the secular nature of international relations.

The adaptation of traditional practices such as the ifoga for use in formal state diplomacy presents several ethical challenges. One primary concern is the risk of cultural appropriation. When non-Samoan officials or governments utilise ifoga, there is a danger of misappropriating or misrepresenting the ritual's cultural significance. This raises questions about who has the right to perform or accept an ifoga, and whether its use outside of its original cultural context diminishes its meaning and

power. Additionally, there is the ethical dilemma of power dynamics in diplomatic settings. The ifoga traditionally involves a profound act of humility and submission, which may be problematic when translated into state-level interactions where maintaining diplomatic parity is crucial. Suffice to say that the majority of Pacific Islanders in the New Zealand and in parliament at the time of Ardern's apology were Samoans, who advised on the ritual.

Furthermore, the use of ifoga in diplomacy raises questions about the universality of ethical norms in international relations. While the ritual may be deeply meaningful in Samoan culture, its effectiveness and appropriateness in addressing complex geopolitical issues between nations with different cultural backgrounds is debatable. There is a risk that relying on culturally specific practices could lead to misunderstandings or even exacerbate tensions if not handled with extreme sensitivity and cultural competence.

Nevertheless, on balance, the fusion of Oceanic practices such as the ifoga with Western diplomatic norms presents a promising avenue for enriching and diversifying international relations. It also expands the diplomatic toolkit, potentially leading to more effective conflict resolution and negotiation strategies while fostering mutual understanding through cultural diplomacy.

## **Conclusion: The enduring power of Oceanic diplomacy and the ifoga**

This exploration of the Samoan ifoga reveals its profound significance as a cornerstone of Oceanic Diplomacy, challenging conventional Western-centric models and offering valuable insights for contemporary international relations. The ifoga, far from being an antiquated custom, demonstrates the enduring relevance of indigenous diplomatic traditions in navigating complex challenges within the Pacific region and beyond. By prioritising collective responsibility, relationality and the restoration

of social harmony, the ifoga presents a compelling alternative to punitive or purely legalistic approaches to conflict resolution.

This chapter highlights the ifoga's adaptability, as evidenced by its continued relevance in modern Samoan society and its innovative application in international contexts, such as the apologies offered by the New Zealand Government. These instances underscore the potential for indigenous diplomatic practices to foster meaningful reconciliation and strengthen relationships between nations in ways that conventional methods may struggle to achieve. However, they also raise crucial ethical considerations regarding cultural appropriation and the need for genuine cultural consultation when adapting such practices for modern diplomatic settings.

Ultimately, understanding Oceanic diplomacy through the lens of the ifoga offers several key takeaways for scholars and practitioners. It emphasises the critical importance of cultural context in diplomatic engagements, particularly in regions with strong indigenous traditions. It also exemplifies the potential for a more pluralistic approach to global diplomacy, where diverse traditions are acknowledged and incorporated into the broader diplomatic toolkit. By recognising and valuing these varied diplomatic methods, the international community can develop more nuanced, culturally sensitive and effective strategies for conflict resolution, peacebuilding and the promotion of a more inclusive and equitable global landscape. The ifoga, therefore, stands as a testament to the power and potential of Oceanic diplomacy in a rapidly changing world.

## References

Attorney General v Godinet WSCA 6 (Court of Appeal of Samoa, 26 August 2011). <http://www.paclii.org/cgi-bin/disp.pl/ws/cases/WSCA/2011/6.html>

- Carpenter, K., & Tsykarev, A. (2021). Indigenous peoples and diplomacy on the world stage. *American Journal of International Law Unbound*, 115, 118–122. <https://doi.org/10.1017/aju.2021.7>
- Carter, S. G., & Fry, G. (2023). Australia's indigenous diplomacy and its regional resonance in Oceania. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 77(6), 656–663. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2023.2268024>
- Enari, D. (2021). Pasifika identity and well-being: A Samoan diasporic perspective [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Auckland University of Technology.
- Field, M. J. (1991). *Mau: Samoa's struggle for freedom*. Auckland, NZ: Polynesian Press.
- Field, M. J. (2006). *Black Saturday: New Zealand's tragic blunders in Samoa*. Auckland, NZ: Reed Publishing.
- Filoialifi, L. A., & Knowles, L. (1983). The Ifoga: The Samoan practice of seeking forgiveness for criminal behaviour. *Oceania*, 53(4), 384–388.
- Franco, R. (1991). Samoans, World War II, and military work. In G. White (Ed.), *Remembering the Pacific War* (pp. 173–191). Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.
- Fry, G., & Tarte, S. (2015). *The new Pacific diplomacy*. ANU Press. <http://doi.org/10.22459/NPD.12.2015>
- Fry, G., & Tarte S. (2025). 'New Pacific diplomacy' ten years on, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 79(1), 55–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2024.2415123>
- Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our sea of islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6(1), 148–161.

- Huffer, E., & Qalo, R. (2004). Have we been thinking upside-down? The contemporary emergence of Pacific theoretical thought. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 16(1), 87–116. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2004.0011>
- Keresoma, L. (2023, March 30). NZ District Court to consider the application of the Samoan Ifoga in their legal system. Talamua Online News. <https://talamua.com/2023/03/30/nz-district-court-to-consider-the-application-of-the-samoan-ifoga-in-their-legal-system/>
- Kolia, B. F. (2024). Uncovering the mat: Restorative justice for the Dawn Raids? In B. F. Kolia & M. Mawson, (Eds.), *Unsettling theologies: Memory, identity, and place*. Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46121-7\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46121-7_6)
- Latavai, S. F. (2018). The Ifoga ritual in Samoa in anthropological and in biblical perspectives (Doctoral dissertation). University of Hamburg. Missionshilfe Verlag. <https://dnb.dnb.de>
- Macpherson, C., & Macpherson, L. (2000). The Ifoga: Social structure and conflict management in Samoa. *Oceania*, 70(3).
- Meleisea, M., & Schoeffel Meleisea, P. (Eds.). (1989). *Lagaga: A short history of Western Samoa*. Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific.
- Mataia Milo, L. (2016). Subtle invasions: Aspects of Samoan women's wartime experiences [Doctoral dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington]. Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington Repository.
- New Zealand Parliament. (2021, August 10). *Special debates: Dawn Raids* [Hansard transcript]. [https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb\\_20210810\\_20210810\\_24](https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20210810_20210810_24)

- O'Malley, J. W. (2008). *What happened at Vatican II*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Retzlaff, S. (2021, September 15). Samoa's political crisis reaches new heights – Archbishop performs ifoga. *Samoa Global News*. <https://samoaglobalnews.com/samoas-political-crisis-reaches-new-heights-archbishop-performs-ifoga11/>
- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. (2022). *2050 strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*. Pacific Islands Forum.
- Police v Ausage WSSC 7 (Supreme Court of Samoa, 30 April 2007). <https://www.paclii.org/cgi-bin/sinodisp/ws/cases/WSSC/2007/28.html?stem=&synonyms=&query=%20Ausage>
- Sio, A. W. (2021, August 10). Special Debates – Dawn Raids. 754 NZPD.
- St-Pierre, C. (2019, May 7). *Soft power: How Quebec uses cultural diplomacy*. Friends of Canadian Broadcasting. <https://legacy.friends.ca/explore/article/soft-power-how-quebec-uses-cultural-diplomacy/>
- Tuala-Warren, L. (2002). *A study into the ifoga: Samoa's answer to dispute healing* (Issue 4 of Te Mātāhauariki Institute occasional paper series). University of Waikato.
- Watiti, R. (2021, August 10). Special Debates – Dawn Raids. 754 NZPD.
- Wray, M. (2009, January 13). Samoans move to heal rift – Racial tensions begin to ease with reconciliation ceremony. *The Courier Mail*.

# Contributors

**Morgan Brigg** is Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies in the School of Political Science and International Studies at The University of Queensland. He is a specialist in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, governance, and innovative approaches to cross-cultural relations and the politics of knowledge. Much of his research develops and applies ideas of relationism that emphasise the dynamic and interconnected nature of political life among people, cultures and nations. He has developed these ideas in collaboration with Indigenous colleagues and peoples to understand Indigenous political systems and governance, challenge the discipline of political science to better engage with Indigenous peoples, and contribute ways of knowing and working across difference.

**Salā George Carter** is the Deputy Head and Senior Fellow at the Department of Pacific Affairs at the ANU. He is also the Director of the ANU Pacific Institute, and member of the ANU Institute of Climate Change Energy and Disaster. His research explores the interplay of international politics and security, with climate change (diplomacy, negotiations, finance, democracy, gender and knowledge), through the influence and authority/power of Pacific Islands states and peoples. Before completing the PhD program with ANU, he had studied a Masters of Arts in International Relations with Honours, and a Masters of Diplomacy as an Australian Awards scholar. He is also a graduate of Victoria University of Wellington with Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Pacific Studies. Prior coming to Australia, he was a political advisor at the U.S. Embassy in Apia. George's research and teaching interests are informed by his education, work experience in the

Pacific and upbringing through his proud Samoan Tuvaluan, i-Kiribati, Chinese, British ancestry. He serves his family and village in Samoa, where he holds the matai/chiefly title of Salā.

**Paul D'Arcy** is a Professorial Fellow in the Asia Institute's Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies at The University of Melbourne. He was born and raised in Otago, southern Aotearoa New Zealand. His research and teaching focuses on the historical evolution of environmental conflict resolution and local community manifestations of sustainable development across the Asia Pacific region, with particular reference to oceanic islands and continental littorals across the Pacific.

**Jayden (Jay) Evett** completed his PhD on 'The decolonisation of national identity and its impact on Aotearoa New Zealand-Pacific relations' at the Department of Pacific Affairs at the ANU. Born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand, he joined ANU in 2018 when he began a masters degree. Before this, he studied at Te Herenga Waka–Victoria University of Wellington and the Diplomatische Akademie Wien. Jay also has a background in the parliamentary sector, in which he has worked for more than 7 years. He is also affiliated with the Stouth Research Centre for New Zealand Studies at Te Herenga Waka–Victoria University of Wellington. His research straddles the intersection of Indigenous Diplomacies, Pacific, and New Zealand Studies.

**Gregory Fry** is Honorary Associate Professor at ANU and Adjunct Associate Professor in the School of Government, Development and International Affairs, University of the South Pacific (USP). He was Academic Co-ordinator of Graduate Studies in Diplomacy and International Affairs at USP from 2011 to 2015, and Director of Graduate Studies in International Affairs at the ANU from 1988 to 2011. His research focuses on the international politics and diplomacy of the South Pacific region. His publications include *Intervention and state-building in the Pacific* (co-edited with Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, Manchester University Press, 2008); *The new Pacific diplomacy* (co-edited with

Sandra Tarte, ANU Press, 2015) and *Framing the islands: Power and diplomatic agency in Pacific regionalism* (ANU Press, 2019).

**Lorenz Gonschor** initially studied anthropology, political science, and history in Germany, then received a master's degree in Pacific Islands studies in 2008 and a Ph.D. in political science in 2016 from the University of Hawai'i. From 2017 to 2019 he taught at 'Atenisi University in Tonga, and from 2020 to 2022 at the University of French Polynesia in Tahiti. Since 2023 he has been a senior lecturer in politics and international affairs at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. His research interests include historical and contemporary governance and politics of Oceania with a special focus on international relations, regionalism and decolonisation. His book, *A power in the world: The Hawaiian kingdom in Oceania*, was published in 2019, and he has authored chapters in the 2022 *Cambridge history of the Pacific Ocean* and in *Unconquered states: Non-European powers in the imperial age* (2024).

**Mary Graham** is a Kombumerri person through her father's heritage and affiliated with Wakka Wakka through her mother's people. She has worked across government and universities, teaching Aboriginal history, politics, and comparative philosophy, and incorporating Aboriginal knowledges into curricula. Mary has held a variety of leadership roles, including as a member of the first Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, on the ATSIC Regional Council for Southeast Queensland, and as a member of the ethics council of the National Congress for Australia's First Peoples. She is widely recognised as a leading Aboriginal philosopher and is one of Australia's foremost writers on Aboriginal Australian political philosophy.

**Tony Hiriasia** is from the province of Malaita in Solomon Islands. He graduated with a PhD in Politics and International Affairs from the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji. His research interests lie in the areas of elections, voting behaviour, and gift-giving, and their implications for politics and governance in the Solomon Islands. He has

also worked as a consultant on various donor-funded research projects focusing on development and electoral politics in Solomon Islands.

**Nic Maclellan** is a correspondent for Islands Business magazine (Fiji) and a contributor to Pacnews, Inside Story and other regional media. He was a contributor to *The new Pacific diplomacy* (ANU Press, 2015) and *The China alternative* (ANU Press, 2021). He has published widely on French policy in the Pacific islands and is co-author of *La France dans le Pacifique – de Bougainville à Moruroa* (Editions La Découverte, Paris) and *After Moruroa – France in the South Pacific* (Ocean Press, New York and Melbourne). His latest book, *Grappling with the bomb* (ANU Press, 2017) – a history of British nuclear testing in Kiribati – was shortlisted for the EPAA “Scholarly Book of the Year” in 2019. He was awarded the 2020 Sean Dorney Grant for Pacific Journalism by the Walkley Foundation.

**Fiaame Naomi Mata’afa** served as the seventh Prime Minister of Samoa, and the country’s first female leader of the government from 2021–2025. She is a Matai, a High Chief from Lotofaga who first entered politics in 1985 under the Human Rights Protection Party. She became a cabinet minister, and subsequently the deputy prime minister. In 2021 Fiaame made history by leading the Faatuatua le Atua Samoa ua Tasi Party to victory as the Prime Minister. Her career has led her to lead many Pacific, Commonwealth and UN diplomatic campaigns supporting small islands states, climate action and justice, gender and women rights, community and people-centered development. Fiaame’s service to politics and diplomacy in the Pacific and abroad follows the service of her parents, Samoa’s first prime minister Fiaame Mata’afa Faumuina Mulinu’u II and La’ulu Fetauimalemau Mata’afa, who became Samoa’s first high commissioner and female diplomat to New Zealand.

**Tuala Sau'i'a Louise Mataia Milo** is Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the National University of Samoa. She has taught history at the university for more than twenty years. Louise received her Bachelor of Social Sciences/ Diploma in Teaching from the University of Waikato and a Post Graduate Diploma and a Master of Arts from Otago University. In 2017 she was conferred Doctor of Philosophy from Victoria University of Wellington. Louise's area of research is Samoan migration and popular culture during the colonial period, and Pacific people's participation in international conflicts. She is currently working on a manuscript on Samoan women's experiences during the Second World War. Louise is also a Samoan matai (chief) and an active community worker.

**Theresa Meki** is a Pacific Research Fellow in the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific at the Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific. She completed her doctoral studies in 2021. Her PhD thesis is a political ethnography that investigates the 2017 PNG national elections from a gendered perspective. She is primarily interested in gender and elections in Melanesia but has recently ventured into PNG history and biography writing. She is one of the co-conveners of the PNG Dictionary of Biography project.

**Gordon Leua Nanau** is Associate Professor of Pacific Studies and Co-Head Te Wānanga o Waipapa | School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies at Waipapa Taumata Rau | The University of Auckland (UoA). He comes from Tathimboko on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands and attended the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji and the University of East Anglia, United Kingdom. Prior to joining UoA in 2024, he was Senior Lecturer in the School of Government, Development & International Affairs at USP. He also worked with the Guadalcanal Provincial Government and the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), now Solomon Islands National University (SINU) in Honiara. His research interests revolve around Pacific politics and governments, development issues, social change, and local knowledge systems and values in Pacific Islands communities.

**Anna Naupa** is a ni-Vanuatu PhD candidate at the Australian National University, School of Culture, History and Language, where her research interests include Pacific politics, statecraft, cultural security, and Melanesian diplomacy. She has worked at the regional level in the Pacific, including holding senior advisory and management roles at the Pacific Fusion Centre, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. She holds MAs in geography and public administration from the University of Hawai‘i–Mānoa and Harvard University’s Kennedy School, respectively.

**Robert Nicole** is an inter-disciplinary scholar with an academic background in literature, history, and politics. He is a proud graduate of the University of the South Pacific (BA and MA) and the University of Canterbury (PhD). He taught History and Politics at the University of the South Pacific for more than 25 years before moving to Christchurch in 2023. He is now senior lecturer in Pacific Studies at the University of Canterbury and editor of the journal, *Pacific Dynamics*. His publications span several disciplines including Literature, Cultural Studies, Education, History and Politics.

**Gonzaga (Zag) Puas** holds a Bachelor of Arts, Graduate Diploma of Education, Bachelor of Law (LLB), Master of Political Science and a Doctorate in history. Born and raised in Chuuk State on the Island of Lukunor, Federated States of Micronesia, and from the Sor clan. He is the Director of the Micronesian Institute for Research and Development (MIRAD). He was a research fellow at the Australian National University in the Department of Pacific Affairs for many years before joining the Pacific Islands University in Guam teaching history. Currently, he is an adjunct senior research fellow in the Australian Centre for Pacific Islands Research at the Sunshine Coast University, Queensland Australia. His ANU doctoral thesis was published in 2021 by the ANU Press as *Federated states of Micronesia’s engagement with the outside world: Control, self-preservation and continuity*.

**Jope Tarai** is a PhD student at the Department of Pacific Affairs at the ANU. His main research interests include digital politics and governance, regional politics, Pacific diplomacy and tuna politics. He completed a Master of Arts in Politics and International Affairs at the University of The South Pacific on the South Pacific Tuna Treaty: A case study in Collective Diplomacy.

**Atō'ese Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano** was formerly Associate Professor in History and Head of School of Social Sciences at the Laucala-based University of the South Pacific (USP). He was born and raised in rural villages of Falelatai and Leulumoega in Samoa and then in suburban North Island, NZ before Suva, Fiji. He has served on the USP Council as a student and staff representative and is a founding member of the USP Alumni Association. His current research focuses on the evolutionary development between pre-literate (indigenous) and literate (non-indigenous) forms of governance in Western Polynesia.

**Anthony Tutugoro** comes from the northern province of New Caledonia, in the north-east of the main island, Grande Terre. He studied law and political science at the University of New Caledonia, the University of Rennes 1, and the University of French Polynesia. Since 2017, he has been teaching in the Department of Law, Economics and Management and the Department of Languages, Literature and Humanities at the University of New Caledonia. In 2024, he was awarded a PhD in political science by the University of French Polynesia for his thesis on 'Analysis of Strategies for Regaining Sovereignty by the Independence Movement in New Caledonia', which he presented at a viva in Nouméa at the University of New Caledonia. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher in political science at the University of New Caledonia for an international research program "INCLUSIVEPEACE: Citizen Inclusion in Power-Sharing Settlements". His research focuses on political violence, collective action, decolonisation, and power-sharing.