'Not like before': An ethnographic study of land, continuity, and climate in Taveuni island, Fiji

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Abstract

This thesis explores the entwined relationship between past, present, and future in the everyday reflections, stories, and prophecies, in Taveuni, Fiji. Following the return of indigenous former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka to power, talk of 'going back' was rife amongst indigenous, rural Fijians. The prospective aspect of this nostalgia incorporated feelings of indigenous decline and posited a *return* of the past. In Taveuni, people frequently referred to this sense of decline in terms of the island's once-famously fertile volcanic soil paling in comparison to yesteryear. In this thesis I explore readings of land decline in relation to the sentiments they evoke, where the land simultaneously *measures, corroborates,* and *forecasts* that which is to come. I engage frequently employed dialectics within Fijian ethnography to highlight how interlocutors balance Biblical fatalism with narratives of continuity that compress pre-colonial and postcolonial times. This seeming contradiction is part of an indigenous, self-reflexive response to the scientific and modernist claims of climate change, which prescribe an increasingly foreclosed future. To explore the internal tensions produced by these varied temporal orientations, I focus on the topics of land history, contemporary exchange, and environmental concern, as encompassing enduring issues of injustice, morality, and futurity. In drawing on the syncretic visions of my interlocutors, the main contribution of this thesis is to further anthropological understanding of meaning-making in periods of change, unpredictability, and frequent confoundment, when time and change is said to be 'so fast'. Past-oriented futurity, then, coalesces the past, present, and future, to bring forth varied *returns*: of land, power, and the Lord.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	
ALTA	Agricultural Land and Tenant Act
COP	Conference of Parties (annual meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)
CSR	Colonial Sugar Refining Company
GCC	Great Council of Chiefs
LCC	Land Claims Commission (set up in 1875 to resolve pre-Cession disputes)
NAF	National Archives Fiji
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NLC	Native Lands Commission (set up in 1880 to register all indigenous Fijian land)
RFMF	Royal Fijian Military Forces
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
TKDD	Taveuni Kava and Dalo Dealers
TLFC	iTaukei Land and Fisheries Commission
TLTB	iTaukei Land Trust Board

Glossary

Bati balavu - warriors who protect the outer boundaries of the village and its chief

Bati leka - warriors who protect the inner boundaries of the village and its chief

Butako – theft

Caga walu – outstretched span of hand from tip of thumb to tip of little finger, eight times

Cakau – reef

Cobo – clap with cupped hands, making a hollow sound

Co tawa yaga - weeds

Dalo - taro

Dinau – credit

Draki veisau – climate change

Dravu-i-siga – drought, turned to ashes by the sun

Gauna buliruarua – time of the double installation

Girmit – indentured labour system which brough Indians to Fiji between 1879-1916

Gonedau – fishermen clan

Grog – kava

ivalala vakavanua - acceptable protocols in the way of the land

Ika – fish

isevu – first fruits presentation, normally to chief

iTaukei – indigenous Fijians

Kakana dina – true foods, i.e. taro, cassava, yams

Kalouca – bad luck

Kalou vu - traditional root gods

Kalou yalo – traditional deified gods, born human

Kasa – kava stem with one node for re-planting

Katuba – door

Kerekere – traditional request

Koro – village

Kove - coffee

Kudru ni vanua – anger of the land

Lali – wooden drum

Liu – past, in front

Lolo – coconut milk

Loloma – love

Lotu – church

Lovo – earth oven

Madua – shame

Marama – woman of high rank

Masi kuvui – paper mulberry tree, used to make barkcloth outfit

Mata – taro sprouts

Matanigasau – traditional apology

Mata-ni-tikina – district spokesperson

Matanitu – confederation

Mata-ni-vanua – village spokesperson

Mataqali – patrilineal clan, landowning unit

Nau - grandma

Niu – coconut

Qali vanua – subject state

Qase – elders

Qoliqoli – traditional fishing grounds

Qusinoloaloa – traditional act of gratitude, gifting, lit. wiping away the darkness

Rourou – taro leaves cooked in coconut milk

Salusalu – garland

Sasa – coconut leaves

Sasalu – bêche-de-mer, sea cucumbers

Sau – traditional spiritual power often associated with chiefs or chiefly families

Sau tabu – chiefly burial grounds

Sau turaga – kingmakers, elect the chief in village

Sevusevu – ritual presentation of kava

Sobu – down

Solesolevaki – communal labour

Tabu – ban, forbidden areas

Tabua – tooth of sperm whale, most valuable object in iTaukei exchange and ceremony

Tagi valu – war cry

Talanoa – dialogue, stories

Tanoa – kava bowl

Tausala-ni-Samoa – type of taro, favoured for export

Tevoro – devil

Tikina – district

Tiri – mangroves

Tivoli – yams

Tokatoka - family unit

Tui - chief

Turaga – chief, gentleman

Turaga-ni-koro – village headman

Turaga-ni-yavusa – tribal headman

Tuvu – freshwater pools in the foreshore

Vakaturaga – chiefly behaviour

Vakavanua – in the way of the land

Vale-ni-teitei – farmhouse

Vanua - holistic indigenous Fijian concept of land, relationality, spirituality, and custom

Vasu – offspring living in their mother's village

Vata – shelf

Vatu Tabataba – rock with handprints

Vatu Vola – rock writing

Veidokai - engaging respect

Veikau – forest land

Veivakabauti - trust

Veivakarokorokotaki - mutual respect

Veiwekani – kinship

Vere ka Bau - tactical style warfare

Vola ni Vula Vakaviti – Fijian calendar

Vulagi – visitor, foreigner

Vuna – the cause, the source

Vutu-ni-yau – wealthy

Wa-ni-sau – sinnet rope with cowry shell ornament attached to kava bowl

Wai-ni-biu – coconut water

Yaca – namesake

Yalayala – boundary, border

Yaqona - kava (Polynesian name), a ceremonial drink made from the dried, pounded roots of the *Piper methysticum* plant

Yasana – province

Yau – treasured goods

Yavu – house foundations of original ancestors

Yavusa – tribe, collection of clans with common ancestral deity

iTaukei Pronunciation

b as ‘mb’ in timber

d as ‘nd’ in land

q as ‘ng’ plus ‘g’ in finger

g as ‘ng’ in singer

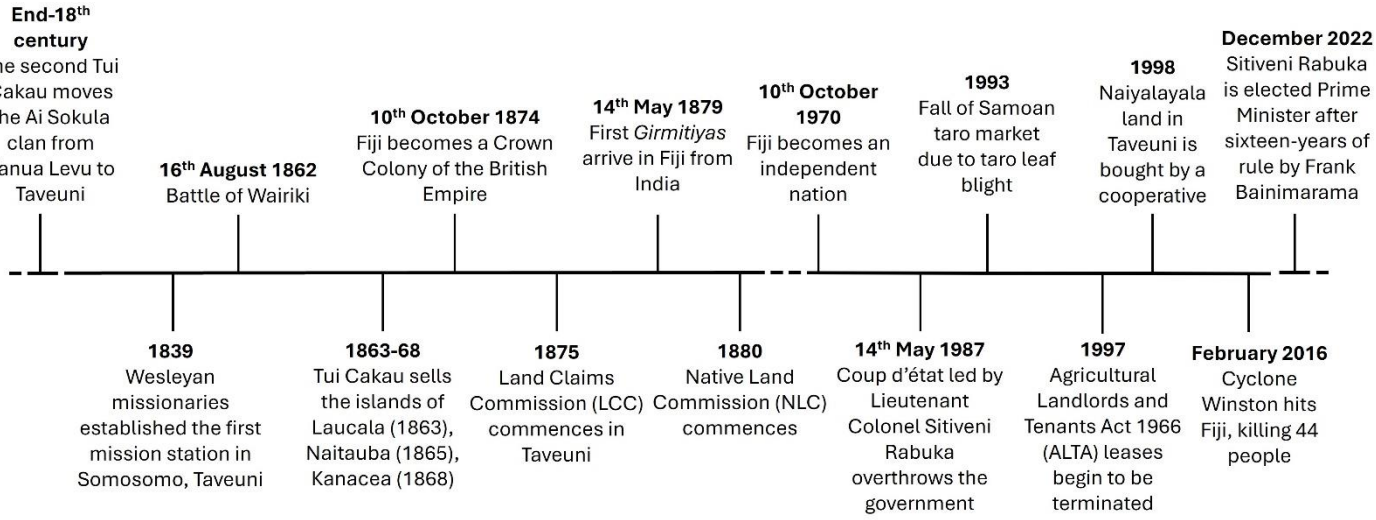
c as ‘th’ in mother

Note on terms:

I use the terms iTaukei, indigenous Fijian, and Fijian interchangeably. I use the term Indo-Fijian for people of Indian descent. I also use the term Fijian to denote any individual born in Fiji. Under the Citizenship Act of the 2013 Constitution all citizens of Fiji are to be known as Fijians. I note all of this because in vernacular discourse between individuals (of both ethnic backgrounds, as will be clear from direct quotations), ‘Fijian’ is frequently used to denote iTaukei/indigenous Fijians and ‘Indians’ to denote Indo-Fijians. I am therefore aiming to balance common usage, constitutional revisions, and ongoing debates around these terms.

Whilst academics such as Epeli Hau’ofa have inspiringly promoted the geographical term Oceania, I use the terms Pacific islands/the Pacific to denote the region, as this was the term used by interlocutors.

Timeline of key historical events



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I can trace the first thoughts of doing a Masters that would eventually lead me to doing a PhD back to moments - years ago - in a converted farmhouse in Kent when I was foraging around for *something*, so sincere thanks to Miles and Ali Irving, and to Fred, for opening my eyes up to wilder worlds, it continues to inspire me.

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I dedicate this thesis to my Mum, Nitza Saunders, whose seeking inspired mine.

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Introduction

Places, names, histories

Each place in Taveuni has a name and a story, and although some are forgotten or lost the search goes on for their meaning. I am staying in Wairiki (the story of happiness after finding water, from *wai* - water, *reki* - joy), nearby is Naiyalayala (meaning 'the end', or the 'border' between ancient polities), there is Baniose (where horses used to be held), Savuwaqa (the waterfall shaped like a boat), Mudre (lit. a 'cooling breeze', a place known for its windiness), Vunitamaridi (named for its tamarind tree), Malawai (*mala-ni-wai*, meaning no water), and the Christian place names Betelema (where the first grotto of Mary was constructed in Holy Cross Parish land) and Fatima (after Our Lady of Fatima, where the people of Naqelelevu island live). The land speaks its histories in its names. Nearby, a little way down the shoreline where a small resort now sits is Tovutovu, the site of a great battle in the 19th century, the meaning of the name variously interpreted as to do with seawater or small hills. It is here that a friend of mine told me she heard the cries of Tongan warriors. Later, another friend said her family often fished there, even at night, 'we don't hear anything, nothing bothers us, no more spirits 'cos we read our Bible'.

Stories are told about the land constantly, layering on top of each other as symbols are interpreted, reinterpreted, and integrated within systems of meaning. In the year 2000, hundreds of people gathered on the island to be the 'first' to enter the new millennium, above one of the local shops there is a sign that reads: 'Yesterday. Tomorrow.' The suggestion is that by taking just one step, one can enter the past, or the future, and back again. The sign which marks the meridian line is a little ways away, next to a field where rugby is played each evening, but it has moved three times in the last few decades, an old version painted for the new millennium read: '*This is where each day begins'*. The meridian line crosses land in only two other places in the world: the others being on the far eastern point of Vanua Levu, the second largest island in Fiji across the Somosomo strait from Taveuni, and in remote Siberia. The line is often cited as part of the mystery of water on the island, the northern half has flowing rivers, whereas the southern end relies on rainwater and, occasionally, the water truck. Its position, splitting the two halves of Taveuni, also correlates with the old border between the two ancient polities of Taveuni: the northern end of Lekutu and the southern end of Vuna.

Research context

Weeks before I arrived in Fiji for the first time in January 2023, I was wary that a country which had experienced three military coups in the preceding thirty-five years had just undergone a major political shift. The ruling Fiji First party of Frank Bainimarama had been ousted from power after sixteen-years rule, and the man to take his place was a figure who loomed large over Fiji's recent history, the leader of the 1987 military coup and former prime minister, Sitiveni Rabuka. I scoured online reports, posts, and murmurings to find clues to the mood; some were jubilant, some disappointed, some were, however, decidedly afraid. Many fears stemmed from the fact that Fiji had only returned to a parliamentary democracy in 2014, and when there was no clear majority in the 55-seat parliament, tensions rose that a peaceful transition of power would not take place.

Eventually, a slight margin was established through the establishment of the 'People's Coalition', and on 24 December 2022, Rabuka was elected PM, having gained 28 votes in a secret ballot of MPs, just one more than his rival. A week before I was scheduled to depart for Fiji a concerning news bulletin came in: the commander of the Royal Fijian Military Forces (RFMF), Major General Jone Kalouniwai, had negatively appraised the speed of the new coalition's policy changes, hirings, and firings, reminding the new government of the RFMF's constitutional obligation to 'ensure at all times the security, defence, and well-being of Fiji and all Fijians'.[1] This comment struck at the spectre of the country's past and Fijians' fears of a return to the days of coups. I double-checked my plane ticket's terms and conditions. None of the worst fears came to pass, though, and I travelled to Fiji at the end of January 2023, with a new, *former*, prime minister. When I arrived, I queried if the situation was settled, though people responded to me with the fact that Bainimarama still occupied the prime minister's residence, over a month after losing office - the past seemed to linger still in myriad ways.

The return of Sitiveni Rabuka to prominence signalled a wider sense of *return* in iTaukei (the term used for indigenous Fijians) consciousness, of traditional authority and chiefly respect, linked – as it had throughout Fijian colonial history – to Bauan supremacy. This was made clear to me one day as I stood outside the law courts in Suva city, admiring the statue of Ratu Epenisa Seru Cakobau, the self-styled *Tui Viti* (King of Fiji), wrapped in traditional dress, facing directly at the legislature's buildings. A man, waiting for his friend to exit the courts, approached me and pointed to the statue, telling me Cakobau 'gave' Fiji to Great Britain, pausing: '*Otherwise we would be like Hawai'i*'. I mention the front-page news, the first installation since 1989 of a new *Vunivalu kei Bau* (Chief of Bau): 'his namesake', he adds, gesturing to the statue. The framing of indirect colonial rule as protectionist is common and

[1] Reuters, 2023. Note: Kalouniwai was quickly summoned to meet the Minister for Home Affairs, and a 'courtesy call' to the PM's office a week later, 23rd January 2023, was a powerful statement of his commitment to democratic law, though the insinuation of military intervention lingered.

widespread in iTaukei society, being *like Hawai'i* could be interpreted as ceding to the United States, but it also suggests a deeper lament of that island group's indigenous decline as a cause of the loss of land rights. As another lady told me, Fijians could have 'ended up like the Aborigines in Australia, the Indians in the US, the Maori in New Zealand…but we took our land back'. With the installation of the *Vunivalu kei Bau* there was a return to an ideal of Bauan paramountcy, the first Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) meeting to be held (the first since its disbanding by the former prime minister) on that small island in the following months.[2]

'Going back', as any national project which draws its momentum from prospective nostalgia, has many meanings and its relative value is dependent wholly on the audience. The return of Rabuka for some symbolised a different kind of backwards trajectory, to ethnic division. On the 14th May 1987, after one month in power, the coalition of the Fiji Labour Party and the Indian National Federation party was overthrown by military coup led by Rabuka, the date being particularly meaningful as exactly 108 years prior, the schooner Leonidas had arrived in Levuka carrying the first Indian indentured labourers to step foot in Fiji, of which over sixty-thousand would arrive over the period 1879-1916 under the *Girmit* system. The coup, over a century later, was a signal that the embattled historical alignment of chiefly and colonial rule would not readily accept what could be viewed as a class-based, multi-racial movement threatening the fundamental paramountcy of traditional authority. The violence and looting of Indo-Fijian businesses in the capital had etched itself into Fijian historical consciousness much more than a purely political seizing of power might have done, providing stark examples of injustices performed by neighbours.[3] Thirty-five years later, Rabuka *re*-presents himself to the country assiduously in reformed, peaceful, grandfatherly ways, an elder statesman for all Fijians, but visceral memories remain.

Remembrances and *lingerings* are suggestive of the ghost-like quality of the return to power of Rabuka. Indeed, ghosts are figured within iTaukei cultural logics as indicative of the violation of custom, their appearance responding to a need to 'protect' indigenous interests, especially from outsiders.[4] The cultural conservatism of ghosts, in their role as protectors, invites moral reflexivity and fearfulness of retributive justice. As one man described the abandoned house of a European man who had

[2] As I write this in July 2025, the installation of the Tui Nayau, the paramount chief of the Lau islands, is taking place, the first since 2004 upon the death of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Fiji's first post-independence Prime Minister between 1970 and 1992, except a brief stint in 1987. Roko Tevita Uluilakeba Mara (Roko Ului), his only surviving son, now assumes the role.

[3] Similar – though lengthier and more violent - events took place in the 2000 coup, where Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and 44 MPs were taken hostage, which felt to some Indo-Fijians 'like a return to 1987' (Trnka, 2011, p.333).

[4] Presterudsuen, 2014, pp.132-4. Note: the author traces the slippage of terms between root-gods (*kalou-vu*), deified mortals (*kalou yalo*), Western ideas about ghosts and, variously, devils (*tevoro*).

committed suicide years before, he paused: *'His description was just like you, I hope it's not you'*. I sheepishly laughed to assuage his fears. The added fact the man's Fijian wife was said to have left him may have added to the neighbour's fears of ghostly return. These presences *out of time* are, thus, indicative of notions of justice that are as entwined with the past as they are anxieties over the future.

In this thesis, I approach ghosts in both: the ethnographic ways they appear to interlocutors as *actual* ghosts (in the vein of other Pacific ghostly presences to be explored in the literature review below), and as an analytical resource to explore contemporary spectrality. Lincoln and Lincoln's (2015) distinction between primary and secondary hauntings is useful here: primary hauntings suggesting direct experiences of disembodied spirits that provoke both dread and the risk of psychic and physical harm, whilst secondary hauntings are mediated by an author, metaphoric, and more self-conscious forms, wherein 'fear takes the form of horror at the atrocities others inflicted on the dead in the past, not dread at what these unquiet spirits are or might do in the present'.[6] In ethnographic analysis, however, this neat division between metaphysics and metaphors frequently fails to hold. As Good et al. (2022, p.445, *italics* added) argue, in anthropological writing 'haunting as an *affective* experience is primary, whether or not this is experienced as *metaphysical* entities'. Thus, *actual* ghosts, and the kinds of colonial hauntings that I write of in various chapters, are both felt by interlocutors in exacting ways, illuminating tensions that persist in the present which require negotiation. My own experience – of being mistaken for a dead person – is reflective of the affective resonances already present in the social field, just waiting to be brought to life by an ambiguous presence.

The presence of others within people is a common concern of Fijians for whom naming practices connect individuals in substantive ways to their namesakes (*yaca*). As I will explore in a later chapter, the extent to which naming a social being confers on them an irreducible substance becomes a problem for those entrepreneurs – middlemen – who seek to distance themselves from histories of economic exploitation. In this case, disembodied entities can be said to linger around - but also *within* – beings, marking forms of spectrality that are entangled within essentialised beings; for example, those with an entrepreneurial *spirit*. The 'spectral turn' within anthropology has thus highlighted the past's persistence in the present and on the ways the affective experience of haunting is associated with troubling memories, injustices, trauma, *and* anxieties regarding the future.[7] However, less focus has been on the historicity of this enduring past and, in turn, the ways in which the past is persistently reconfigured in oppositional ways to the present. Indeed, ghostly returns invite an appraisal of multiple temporalities *and* the social and political arrangements they uphold.

[6] Lincoln and Lincoln, 2015, p.200-1.
[7] Good et al., 2022, p.440.

The nation-wide tour that Rabuka initiated upon taking office, to 'apologise' to chiefs across the land, is one aspect of cultural and moral reflexivity, but also one which indicates the cyclical nature of narratives of decline which incite cultural revivalism. As Tomlinson (2016) writes about ghost stories in Fiji: they *always* call attention to loss, the only hope being found in adhering more faithfully to traditional values. He has termed this the 'perpetual lament' of iTaukei society, an unceasing sense of loss of iTaukei power - a common complaint found also, tellingly, in early colonial Fiji, over a century ago.[9] Common Fijian dialectics of tradition/modernity, the way of land/the way of money, and iTaukei/*vulagi*, are regularly elided in day-to-day life, and in lieu of an essentialist impulse to keep them separate, discursive oppositionality remains. In this thesis, I will contribute to the spectral turn, suggesting that iTaukei frequently employ the past as a *resource* to re-imagine the present and, therein, possible futures. In turn, my thesis offers a Fijian vantage point on issues of historicity and futurity that rearrange contemporary discourses, such as climate change, within local temporal frameworks.

The ethnographic contribution thus adds to a growing anthropological preoccupation with temporal claims to the future, which have immense organising power: 'our concept of the present as present derives from the future'.[10] I argue that attending to local temporal frameworks is important because of climate change discourse's frequent deployment of the Pacific islands as a way of apprehending the future, and in this way it 'activates' the present to *its ends*.[11] The risk of climate change discourse becomes, thus, less to do with environmental change and more the recapitulation of old theories for a new discursive regime: tropes of island ephemerality, culture loss, climatic determinism, and scientific chauvinism *creating* islands of vulnerability.[12] In this thesis, thus, I put in dialogue local and global temporalities through overlapping, merging, and contrasting narratives of land-based reciprocity, Biblical literalism, and climate doomsdayism. Within each, sets of practices and actions are derived from the posited causal relationships between the past, present, and future. I will highlight through ethnography in later chapters the ways in which individuals negotiate varied modes of apprehending the future to make sense of the present, to identify what is familiar and what is

[9] Tomlinson, 2004. See also definitions of Fiji's iTaukei name – Viti – as evidences of this sense of loss, variously meaning 'to break off small branches' as a wayfinding tactic of ancient ancestors, being 'lost at sea' (Capell, 2018, p.264), it also denotes being cut off from a 'bigger, glorious tribe in a much larger nation...which is now forgotten and darkened by the mists', the name Viti thus being a commemorative one (Vuataki, 2013, p.3, also: Tuwere, 2002).
[10] Bryant and Knight, 2019, p.16.
[11] DeLoughrey, 2018, Rubow and Bird, 2016, Rudiak- Gould, 2013.
[12] Heymann, 2010.

surprising, and to highlight the role of narratives in managing the 'uncanniness of everyday life when the unexpected becomes routine'.[13]

That this ethnography takes the future seriously, then, is an effect of a compounding concern with the relationship between anthropology and history, which reflects interlocutors' prevailing concern with the past's endurance in the present. The fundamental question becomes one of whether anthropology should study socio-cultural phenomena synchronously (past and present coexist) or diachronically (the past shapes the present).[14] The study of 'modern time' has come to define not only what time *is*, but also what it should be *used for* and in this sense is integral to questions of ethics and human agency.[15] But, as Bryant and Knight (2019, p.195) argue in *The Anthropology of the Future*, modernity's understanding of teleology as linear does not allow for other teleological endings, which remain 'open and indeterminate'. I define modernity, rather than *of* time itself (an epoch which is historically understood as having begun in the 16th and 17th centuries with the scientific revolution heralding in rationalism, secularism, and a mechanistic world image), as *about* time, and one's relationship to time. As an *ethos about time*, modernity concerns creating 'difference from the past (the ancients), and a notion of continuously evolving horizons', with the irony that its fundamental aspect – of being the 'negation of stable forms and ideas' through its 'continuous stress on transformation and transgression'[16] – is often mirrored in the Pacific anthropological literature on process, land, and kinship detailed below. The Pacific's history of migration, McCall (1996, p.8) argues, has meant that islanders have always related to absent others due to 'time-space distanciation' in ways that have 'led from the centrist character of modernity to the fragmentation of the post-modern, [such that] Islands might be said to be the original post-modern society'. Where modernity's meta-narrative is increasingly fragmented, thus, we are left with the spectral remains of its teleology, a flickering of an ending which is suffused with ambivalence: the sense of false promises and vestigial hope.

Thomassen (2012), in his critique of the multiple modernities paradigm within anthropology, cautions that in the paradigm's 'celebratory stance' towards pluralism and its attempts to 'liberate' modernity from Euro-centric connotations, its risk is that we are merely 'decorating cultural relativism' in making everything 'differently modern'. His argument follows that paying attention to the ethnographic weight of 'modernity' in the vernacular (in short: how people frequently use the term 'modernity' in the singular in a positive light, despite being laden with modernisation theory) is integral to anthropology's understanding of modernity in the plural. At a level once removed the question remains whether these

[13] Bryant and Knight, 2019, p.50.
[14] Ibid., p.192.
[15] Bear, 2016.
[16] Thomassen, 2012, p.172-3.

constitute 'varieties of modernity' or 'truly' multiple modernities. Rather than try to rigidly define modernity, then, I follow in the vein of much ethnographic work which attempt to trace its contours through the everyday work of cultural elaboration and strategies that confront the aspects of the modern: 'over-confidence in human autonomy and rationality… limitless growth and constant self-overcoming'.[17] I do this primarily at the intimate level – the experiential form of modern temporal configurations disembedded from natural cycles – as individuals confront time which presents moments as 'radically transitory', experienced within a 'a finite, temporal world of objects'.[18] This linear 'empty' time, thus, breaks from the past – indeed, it is about loss of faith in the past – and 'throws us mercilessly into the future'.[19]

In a more macro reading of modern temporality, modernity's march of progress produces the 'allochronically excluded', as the actualisation of the imagined future is what matters. This process, I argue, is mirrored in the construction of 'climate time'. The opening up of new possibilities of exclusion frequently denies (or mystifies) simultaneity in the goal of bringing forth the 'anticipated future', rendering space (islands) into time (a vanishing past).[20] The allegory of islands *out of time* (both running out of time and, as the classic view renders them, timeless), however, frequently produces ambivalences when they encounter local, overlapping teleologies, which call forth the past (through Biblical prophecy and ancestral narratives of continuity) to make sense of the present and future. In the following chapters, then, I will pay ethnographic attention to the ways in which the discursive production of temporal oppositionality, indeed, of keeping separate the past, present, and future, becomes of central concern to questions of property, tradition, and environmentalism. Taking inspiration from anthropological hauntology and historical anthropology, this ethnographic research foregrounds the entwined notions of history and subjectivity, wherein multiple temporalities, narratives, and eschatologies challenge the linear 'historicist notions of the progress from the known past to present to anticipated future'.[21]

[17] Thomassen, 2012, p.174.
[18] Hammer, 2011, pp.37-57.
[19] Ibid., p.37.
[20] DeLoughrey, 2019, p.166 & p.179.
[21] Good et al., 2022, p.442.

Introducing the research site

Taveuni, the 'Garden Island', is the third largest island in Fiji, measuring at around 26 miles long and 6 miles wide, with a population of approximately 16,000, of which around three-quarters are iTaukei (see Figure 1). It is comprised of three districts: Vuna in the south, Wainikeli in the north/north-east, and Cakaudrove in the west (which also extends to Vanua Levu across the Somosomo strait). Lying just south of the larger island Vanua Levu, visible from the eastern shores, it forms one axis of the 'triangle of the Pacific', denoting the surrounding islands' storied pasts - the nearby island of Kioa, home to descendants of displaced Tuvaluans from Vaitupu atoll (having been bought in 1946 due to overpopulation) and Rabi, home to descendants of those who came from Banaba (then known as Ocean Island) in Kiribati from 1945 onwards, as an effect of the British Phosphate Company's ravaging of their home island.[22] In this way, linked by frequent small canoes, these three islands form a microcosm of Melanesia-Micronesia-Polynesia across the Somosomo strait. Histories of displacement and migration are made apparent in southern Taveuni, with peoples from islands such as Naqelelevu, Naitauba, Kanacea, and Vanua Levu living in variously native, leasehold, and freehold lands.

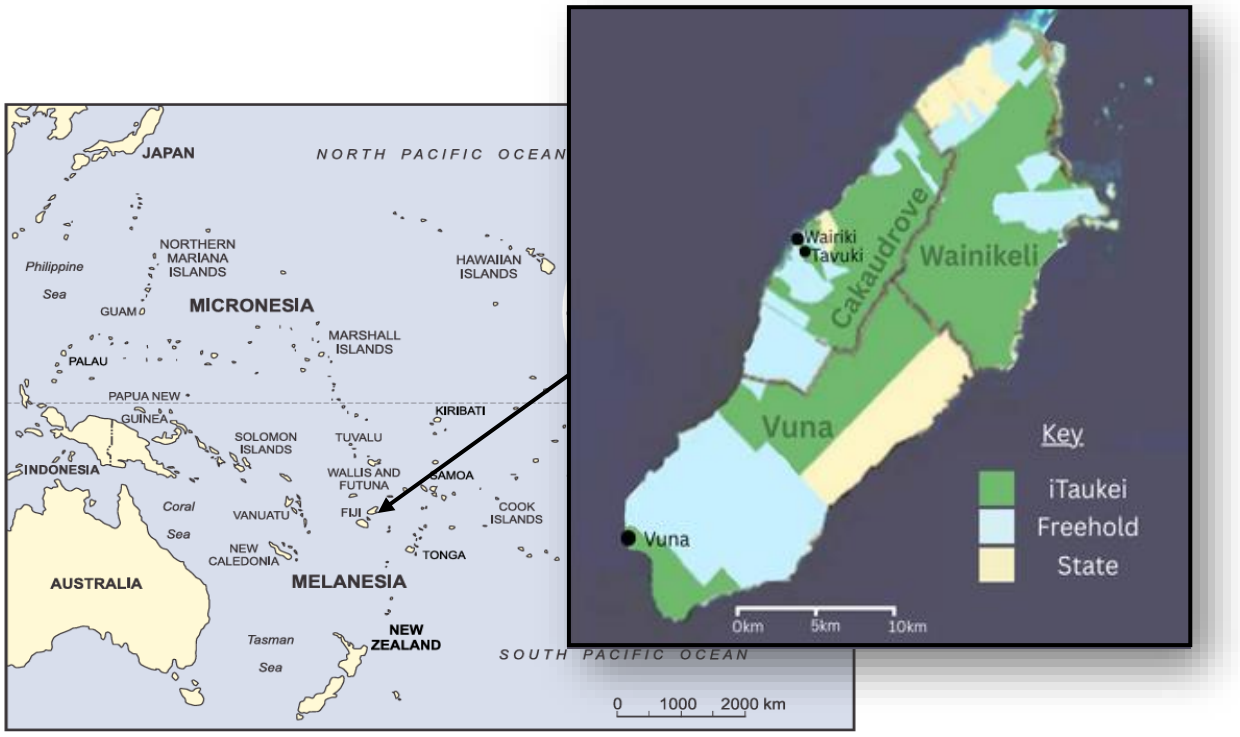

Figure 1. Map of region with insert of Taveuni. Insert shows land ownership distribution in Taveuni: 54% iTaukei (across 122 *mataqali* landowning units), 33% freehold, and 13% state land. This is compared to the national average of around 88% iTaukei land. The villages highlighted are the prime research sites for this thesis (adapted from the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), 2020, p.9).

[22] See Teaiwa, 2014.

The island is unique in the Fiji group for its relatively high level of alienated land.[23] The so-called 'freehold paradise' of the south of the island, where this research is focused, is a mosaic of freehold plots, large formerly European-owned estates subdivided into small-scale farm leases, and native lands surrounding iTaukei villages.[24] From the 1990s onwards, the combination of taro export demands and in-island migration on account of the non-renewal of land leases under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (ALTA) (previously the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Ordinance of 1966, it was modified and renamed in 1977) in the neighbouring big island of Vanua Levu, has led to an explosion of small-scale, semi-commercial agriculture on Taveuni.[25]

In Taveuni, amongst iTaukei, thus, the entanglement of *land* and *identity* make stories of its historical alienation and potential return central within social, political, and economic discourse. A few months before my arrival in Taveuni, the *yavusa* Wainikeli in Naselesele village in the north had completed the repayment of a government loan for the purchase of alienated land initiated thirty-years before. The four tracts of land of Mua estate, totalling 1184 acres, were previously owned by the Australian conglomerate Burns Philp. The title was presented to the *turaga-ni-yavusa* Wainikeli by the Prime Minister, who remarked that the return of alienated land was also a reclamation of heritage.[26] The Freehold Buy Back Scheme was first initiated in 1989 and expanded considerably by Rabuka's government in 1993 to assist landowning units to buy back lands. At the time of writing, 'Buy Back 3.0' has just been announced with a budget of around $10 million FJD for the financial year 2025/26. The Buy Back Scheme which speaks of alienation, heritage, and ancestral land, comes to *represent* a past that invokes and upholds longer histories of land orthodoxy. The question arises, then, when villagers in Fiji speak of 'returns', of what is this past made of, and for what kind of future?

Two kinds of *return*: land and climate

Centrally important to questions arising from the past's failure to stay *in the past*, is the indigenous conception of the *vanua* as comprising of both physical aspect (land), and socio-cultural, spiritual, and symbolic aspects.[27] Therein, environmental decline in the form of increasing soil infertility and declining crop yields is not set apart from notions of narratives of socio-cultural decline. The ubiquity

[23] SPREP, 2020, p.7.
[24] See Lin 2012, 2015.
[25] SPREP, 2020.
[26] Office of the Prime Minister, 2023.
[27] Ravuvu, 1988, p.7.

of the climate change discourse within the Pacific Islands region has shown the multiplicity of ways people moralise its discursive quality, variously upholding or subverting existing local narratives.[28] Indeed, early in my research I noticed the English term 'climate change' used in vernacular speech in place of its Fijian translation *(draki veisau)* which suggested it was kept at a distance, its foreignness maintained, and – in the vein of millenarian 'loan words' – was made constitutive of a wider framing of socio-cultural fatalism.[29] Indeed, this sense of continuity is part of what de Wit and Haines (2021, p.11, *italics* added) have argued is a re-assumption of agency over notions of 'radical *rupture* as envisaged in global discourses of disappearing islands'. Focusing on the ways in which *continuity* is employed in Fiji across deep histories of land, then, challenges 'end of the world' thinking that discursively disempowers those whose physical risks are deemed highest.[30]

The past can also be made present through the retributive aspect of the land in ways that bolster a dogmatic, culturally conservative vision of 'traditionalism'. Whilst historical analysis has critiqued the colonial formation - and anthropological maintenance - of 'customary land tenure system' in Fiji as erroneously generalising principles across the group, the 'Fijian ethos' in relation to land is defined by its conceptual strictures: egalitarianism, inalienability, and the *mataqali* as basic landowning unit.[31] In view of this, Fijian anthropologist Rusiate Nayacakalou addressed the enduring dilemma of traditionalism and development, concluding that these two options meant Fijian leaders were only ever deemed 'reactionary' (resisting change) or 'anti-Fijian' (yielding to complete acculturation).[32] Nayacakalou, as Tomlinson (2006a) explores, took a critically reflexive stance to 'Fijian tradition' and challenged its colonial reification both in his role as indigenous academic and head of the Taukei Land Trust Board (TLTB). It was in this second role that he suffered most frequent criticisms by chiefs and commoners alike, some suggesting his premature death was a form of 'retribution' for what they perceived as transgressions against the traditional system. In doing critical historiography, clearly, the intimate connection between issues of land and notions of indigenous sovereignty are of foremost importance.

As the above shows, the past becomes a cultural *resource*, as notions of continuity, traditionalism, and retribution are invoked to both explain and shape the future. It is, thus, this orientation towards the

[28] See Connell, 2018, Lazrus, 2012, Nolet, 2018, Rubow, 2018, Rudiak-Gould, 2011, and de Wit et al., 2018, p.14.
[29] See Thomas, 1997, pp.55-6 on 'loan words' in millenarian movements.
[30] Kelman, 2018, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2016.
[31] See France, 1966 and Legge, 1958, pp.170-201, for critical analysis of the influential paper presented by missionary Lorimer Fison on Fijian land tenure (Fison, 1881, especially p.345). Clammer (1973, p.219) particularly laid blame at the feet of anthropologists who focused on debates of individualism/communalism and did not interrogate the colonial aspects of 'land orthodoxy', concluding: 'the dogma of "traditionalism" has become itself tradition'.
[32] Nayacakalou, 1975, p.5.

future that my thesis reflects in its structure, each chapter taking a historical view on a contemporary issue of interlocutors, wherein the central quandary of each is reflective of a past-oriented futurism. Individuals, thus, navigate their sense of identity through the prism of history, whilst not being captive to its strictures, allowing for room to move beyond resistance and yielding to produce new creative tensions. A dynamic approach to historicity is also signalled by the conundrum of the numerous Land Commissions (which are, tellingly, unfinished) which sought to formalise social structure and land boundaries in ways that inverted indigenous socio-political process that remained fundamentally indeterminate. In other words, by making land matters 'immemorial' – implying their historical unquestionability – these codifications attempted to make static that which never was. As the discourse around climate change is ubiquitous in Fiji, then, it attaches to these past-oriented futurisms in ways that open up new moral quandaries and possibilities for syncretisation. In turn, this thesis will explore in later chapters how both visions of the past *and* future influence how climate change is locally moralised within various temporal frameworks.

Literature Review

This section presents a view of the ethnographic scene surrounding Fiji. I will first focus on Melanesianist anthropology where there exists a considerable body of literature pertaining to the topics of land, personhood, and decline. Although this research has illuminated metaphysical concerns related to place-making and history, its regional bias skews towards western Melanesian states such as Papua New Guinea (hereon PNG) which presents problems when applied to the Taveuni case. Fiji, I will argue, presents a unique vantage – as between Melanesia-Polynesia - for exploring intra-Pacific ethnographic 'boundaries'. In closing this brief review, I explore promising lines of research which reorient Pacific ethnography towards the future and challenge historical binaries of continuity/rupture. I argue that further ethnographic attention to the socio-historical specificity of *place* is required in these re-alignments and gesture towards the epistemological challenges that this thesis engages.

Place-making in the Pacific

Studies of land in Melanesian anthropology have emphasised its relationship to history and kinship, providing detailed ethnographic insight into place-making as a dynamic process involving shared production and cultural reproduction. Relationality, as the basis for this process, is the fundamental tenet of the New Melanesian Ethnography (hereon NME) which sought to highlight the ways Melanesians view persons as 'things' in motion, and thus rather than being conceived of as 'logically

prior individuals' are understood as 'relational compositions'.[33] NME is epitomised, and largely inspired by, Strathern's arguments outlined in *The Gender of the Gift* (1988), which challenged the application of Western readings and categories in interpreting Melanesian worlds, especially regarding ideas over property ownership, she stated: 'a culture dominated by ideas about property ownership can only imagine the absence of such ideas in specific ways'.[34] This work thus challenged an ethnographic tradition which posited a taken-for-granted 'bounded individual' and instead focused on the 'relationship between' entities (in her case: males/females) as 'fixed points of reference'.[35] Whilst some scholars have pointed out that NME's extensive studies of Melanesian *alterity* often obscures Strathern's more profound non-commensurability argument,[36] her foremost contrast between 'identities' and 'relations' disentangles genealogy and kinship, allowing for the study of the reproduction of relationships; as Hirsch (2014, p.48) remarks: in the West '[i]ndividuals are a given, in distinction to Melanesia, where individuals are an achievement'. In this, land has always been central to the making of relations and, thus, persons.

Studies on land have highlighted the entanglement of genealogy with inter-generational labour, such that it has been said land is both kinship *and* history.[37] As Lindstrom (1991) has explored in Tanna (Vanuatu), the intrinsic *emplacement* of knowledge means that only those individuals named in relation to a place can speak on important topics such as land boundaries, genealogies, and place-based stories. Moutu (2013, pp.113-44) finds amongst Iatmul (PNG) that naming practices act as claims to land which recall specific events and cosmological heroes, thus only those named in relation to specific places can speak in disputes surrounding that place. Names pre-exist and outlive individuals and are arranged as 'paired brothers' specific to each clan, thus making claims to Iatmul names a 'concern about the future through the past'.[38]

NME literature further challenges biological/social models of kinship, rather viewing kinship *as process*. Leach's (2004) ethnography of Reite (PNG) emphasises life cycle, activities, and creativity in kin-making. He finds that the term *asurung* (blood) is not merely a genealogical substance given immutably at birth, but rather refers to the 'shared history of relations and growth by which persons are understood to come into being… [it is] an *outcome* of the relations which *produce* the person'.[39] As it is 'land which grows people', productive separation is required to produce difference and to avoid

[33] Rollason, 2014, p.6.
[34] Strathern, 1988, p.18.
[35] Ibid., pp.69-70.
[36] Hirsch and Rollason, 2019.
[37] Telban, 2019, Leach, 2004, p.12.
[38] I will further explore the relation of elder brothers/younger brothers in Chapter 1 in discussions around land history and genealogical hierarchy.
[39] Leach, 2004, p.212, *italics* mine.

'marrying oneself', which is achieved through the building of *palem*; elaborate bamboo constructions used to make payments to affinal kin for 'growing' brides. In *palem* construction, relations with spirits of place (*kaapu*) and stories of place (*patuki*) are essential to establishing relation with the 'entities that constitute the powers of fecundity and growth in the land itself' and therein the generation of persons through acts of separation.[40]

Bamford's (2007) work similarly argues against a universally applicable biological paradigm for kinship, instead highlighting the fact that procreation is not the underlying basis for human connection in Kamea (PNG). She argues that it is productive *labour* through planting together that intergenerational links are formed between men which facilitates inheritance. Continuous lines of cultivation are told of in *tambuna storis* (social histories which tell of particular men, tying them to specific lands), and knowledge of these stories and a man's own labour allow for land to be passed down to his sons: 'intentional human effort is required to attach oneself to the male line'.[41] Where male sociality is viewed in these terms as vertical, female sociality (mother-child) is intra-generational and is ritually broken after birth as siblings form into 'one-blooded' groups, detached from their mother, as in the Kamean case: '[s]ubstance…lacks the temporal dimension that makes genealogy coterminous with reproduction in the West'.[42]

Thus, whilst men have a permanence not accessible to women, Bolton (1999) has argued that in Ambae (Vanuatu), a female demonstrates her affiliation to her affinal land by knowing the place and its practices, taking pride in her mobility (through virilocal marriage) and ability to become established – *grow* – anywhere. In the post-colonial period what was once women's 'ordinary practice' became a socio-political tool, as women laid claim to equality with men based on the 'emblematic practice' of validating one's identity as being *of a place*: '*Kastom* makes place evident'.[43] In these examples, a genealogical model of kinship does not encompass what is important for Melanesians, who are instead concerned with the cultivation of relations to place as central to identity-formation.

Decline and loss

The literature above has highlighted the central issue of land as the source of substance which grows persons; thus, studies of decline and loss entwine body and land. Munn (1986) finds in Gawa (PNG) a strong cultural impulse for food constraint; in this way, the body should be 'light' and the land kept 'heavy'. Food consumption is theorised as being counter to the extension of influence (as between

[40] Leach, 2004, p.116.
[41] Bamford, 2007, pp.39-45.
[42] Ibid., pp.62-3.
[43] Bolton, 1999, p.53.

kula exchange pairs) and fame (as across the inter-island world), enabled by surplus food transmission to foreign islands.[44] Thus, when sickness is prevalent in Gawa, curative rituals are enacted in conjunction with rites for crop fertility, turning the body from heavy (sick) to light (healthy) and the land from light (unproductive) to heavy (productive), both of these attempting to allow the 'fame of Gawa' to go on.[45] Where Gawan *fame* is concerned with remembrance, Battaglia (1992) highlights the way these 'extensions' of self, in the form of gifts and exchange across the inter-island world, are necessarily 'forgotten' in mortuary exchange feasts (*segaiya*). As remembrance, indebtedness, and shame entwine, the assembling and disassembling of food and object wealth during these feasts - and subsequent distribution of this wealth - act as 'willed transformation[s] of memory' towards socially productive forgetting.

In analysing a negative cultural reflection, Clark (1989, p.123) writes of Wiru (PNG) ideas of 'shrinking men' as highlighting the body's analytical role, acting as a 'vivid idiom for perceptions of change'. Wiru men are said to take on 'female' positions in society, their ritual modes of gaining status blocked by missionisation and colonialism. Whilst Strong (2007) finds the arrival of outsiders and its resulting refiguring of male-female relations a constitutive part of the 'sorrow' of contemporary post-colonial life, loss – as Battaglia (1992) argues above - is also figured as socially productive (it is to be mourned *and* celebrated), and produces 'an affective continuity between past and present forms of sociality'.[46] Similarly, Tomlinson (2004) identifies continuity in the 'perpetual lament' of kava drinkers in Kadavu (Fiji) between contemporary laments (of loss of indigenous power as a result of overconsumption of kava) with past laments (found throughout the written records on kava consumption), all while engaging in the activity (kava drinking) which produces these negative self-appraisals.

Kirsch (2001, p.168) in his review of legal debates involving indigenous peoples cites 'loss' as a 'critical site for the objectification of culture', in such a way that its conceptualisation both reifies and threatens notions of culture. This evokes an enduring debate within Pacific anthropology as to the issue of essentialised and processual views of 'culture', where a focus on the latter – to avoid objectification – led Sahlins (1993b, p.4) to caution that overemphasising culture-as-process means: 'there can be no such thing as identity…let alone continuity'. Taking the perspective of *loss*, then, denaturalises change to not only emphasise *what has been lost*, but also to better reflect how many Pacific peoples conceive of loss, forgetting, and the incompleteness of intergenerational knowledge transfer as integral to self-understandings.[47]

[44] Munn, 1986, pp.114-118.
[45] Ibid., pp.89-94.
[46] Strong, 2007, p.119, n.3.
[47] Kirsch, 2001, p.169, Lindstrom, 1991, p.120.

Questions of decline and loss implicate notions of property: what *it* is that can be lost. Strathern (2004) has highlighted the multiple layers of abstraction that are enacted in rendering cultural intangibles into legal/economic property which can be 'protected' from loss. In this way, as 'culture' comes to encode 'knowledge', 'indigeneity' comes to be defined as being original owners of 'resources', despite resources not being '*ipso facto* property'.[48] The 'reification' of culture in relation to property claims is drawn from Euro-American framings of *culture as performance*,[49] which is problematised in the following example. Pigliasco's (2013) analysis of *vilavilairevo* (firewalking) amongst the Sawau clan in Beqa (Fiji), finds indigenous framings of touristic displays that challenge the categorical separation of gift/commodity exchange.[50] The 'social inalienability' of firewalking is maintained through an 'enduring sense of place and relationship to the vanua', establishing custodianship (rather than property relations), where tourism becomes part of a new 'strategy of communal nourishment'.[51] The centrality of *place* subverts notions of alienability, as in other cases in Fiji place comes to be associated with *kawa* (genealogical gifts); such as the turtle-callers of Koro island and the bone-healers of Vunidogoloa in Vanua Levu. What may appear at first glance as a transaction resulting in loss (in the form of a 'cultural' commodity) is, inversely, one which nourishes peoples' emplacement in their vanua through the sharing of their *kawa* (gift).

Studies on land also highlight its role in apprehending social relations, resulting in divergent ways *loss* is figured through processes of land formalisation. Sillitoe (1999) argues that loss of land rights amongst members of the Wola community in the Was Valley (Southern Highlands, PNG) is fundamental to their egalitarian, 'stateless' social structure, in which gradual collective forgetting and the return of non-cultivated lands to the wider clan 'reflect the notions of continuity and flow that characterise Wola life, as opposed to boundedness and disjunction'.[52] Loss is not seen to undermine identity nor the social structure but rather constitutes its fundamental ethos, with land being made 'mobile' to better reflect Wola life. Where Wola people 'downplay the existence of boundaries',[53] Riles (1998) finds amongst people in Vanua Levu (Fiji) that land's divisions constitute relations in a delimiting way.[54] Interlocutors told her that things 'never change', due to land boundaries being fixed such that disputes took place between equal, side-by-side disputants. Where for the Wola discursive 'beating' is

[48] Strathern and Hirsch, 2004, pp.2-5.
[49] Kirsch, 2004, p.34.
[50] Toren, 2010.
[51] Pigliasco, 2013, pp.175-6.
[52] Sillitoe, 1999, p.338.
[53] Ibid., pp.332-3.
[54] Sahlins (1957) conclusions from Moala in the Lau group of Fiji similarly highlight how *division* can be employed as an analytic to understand the relationship between land and relations. Though, in his case the relationship is one of gradual fission across three-to-four generations as extended family networks divide up into nuclear units as they become capable of distributing labour across dispersed land.

integral to an egalitarian system of blurred land boundaries,[55] in Riles' (1998) case there can be no such thing as 'discursive prowess' that goes beyond argumentation concretised in land's geometric division: 'within the boundaries'.[56] Land in both these cases is a mediator of relations, one undermining genealogical hierarchical relations (through its fuzzy boundaries), the other delimiting the possibility of questioning these same pyramidal formations (through land's division).

In contrast to these land-centric analyses, Schneider's (2012) ethnography of Pororan islanders highlights local government efforts to 'straighten relations' in the island which undermine modes of apprehending relations through movement defined by the sea: a 'saltwater mode of apprehending relations'. Land in this case is associated with male control over female autonomy; the ability to 'go around', inversely associating the sea's dynamic quality - in the eyes of government officials and mainlanders – to a threatening femininity both 'untrustworthy' and 'promiscuous'. What is threatened by attempts at formalisation is thus ways of being and relating that do not rely on boundaries for definition, but rather movement. In each of these examples, 'loss' is refigured in response to the formalisation of rights, drawing on notions of land (and sea) based modes of apprehending relations. In the following I turn to an underlying tension in applying theories across historic ethnological divisions and interrogate the relational (rather than essentialised) basis of these boundaries. The lines made by outsiders to delimit Oceania, can – with Fiji being across Melanesia (as classically defined by its acephalous, egalitarian polities) and Polynesia (defined by its bounded, hierarchical chieftaincies)[57] – be productively engaged to posit a theoretical argument for engaging with Fiji's spatio-historical specificity and distinct notions of decline and loss.

Regional anthropology and the dialogic approach

I will now highlight two main reasons why applying a strictly Melanesianist perspective to Fijian ethnography is problematic, the first being an analytical concern and the second an ethnographic consideration. The first is the important caveat that many scholars have pointed out Fiji's liminal position between Melanesia-Polynesia, such that some position it outside of Melanesia,[58] with Hau'ofa (2008, pp.39-40, n.1, n.3) reflecting: '[f]or geographic and cultural reasons I include Fiji in Polynesia'. His quick follow-up – that before European imposition there was but a 'vast sea in which people

[55] Sillitoe, 1999, p.347.
[56] Riles' (2001) subsequent work on urban networks in Suva similarly posed the methodological problem of social structures presented as 'wholes', underlined by the ethos of social analysis as 'perpetually unfinished' (Strathern, 1988, p.20).
[57] Sahlins, 1963.
[58] Hirsch and Rollason, 2019, pp.2-3.

mingled…blurring the boundaries even to this day' - suggests his deeper conviction.[59] Fiji presents 'something of a paradox',[60] which provokes questions regarding imagined boundaries variously said to idealise 'a certain ill-defined sameness',[61] or as Thomas (1989, p.32-3) contends: its originating 'explicit evolutionary argument' having an 'underlying continuity' with the constructs of modern anthropologists such that our analysis 'remains at the level of tautology'.

Fiji's liminal position can enact a kind of tautology: evidence of expansive, well-structured pre-contact polities (*matanitu*) being indicative of further cultural analogues between Fiji and Polynesia,[62] whilst anti-colonial strongholds in interior Viti Levu (Western Fiji) were both substantively and *made to appear* akin to the more 'stateless' polities of western Melanesia.[63] Recent archaeological evidence suggests that substantial interaction between Fiji and central Melanesia during the Lapita period,[64] and conversely Tonga's relative isolation and greater level of endogamy, led to the emergence of what is now viewed as a distinctive 'Polynesian' phenotype.[65] In the post-Lapita period, Tonga to eastern Fiji migrations, primarily Lau - but also Rewa, Kadavu, and Nadroga – became more frequent (Tongans attaining Fijian lumber for canoes and inhabiting islands for years) and led to extensive mixing.[66] These historical and geographical realities blur the neat binary that Melanesia/Polynesia suggests and thus locates Fiji *through*, rather than in spite of, oppositional constructs.

I thus argue that – rather than 'moving' Fiji into Polynesia (as if possible) – the ethnological constructs of the division are best approached by attention to the 'bumps' in the geographical gradient,[67] which reflects the broader argument of this thesis that assuming boundaries can be a fertile place to investigate reifications. I do this by focusing on Fiji's socio-historical *uniqueness*. More specifically, it is to reflect Taveuni's emplacement in its own pan-Pacific nexus, which is a cause of histories of displacement, the nearby islands of Rabi being the home of Micronesians and Kioa the home of Polynesians.[68] Taveuni has been found to have a Hawaiian kinship system in contrast to the Dravidian system in much of Fiji,[69] and Hocart (1952, pp.3-5) provocatively concludes it is closer to the Tongan

[59] See Hau'ofa, 1994.
[60] Thomas, 1989, p.31.
[61] Sillitoe, 1998, p.1.
[62] Routledge, 1985.
[63] See Kaplan, 1995, and Burley, 2013, p.438, on phenotypical and linguistic similarities
[64] A period spanning 1600 BC to between 500 BC and around the time of Christ in some areas. The migration moved from Southeast Asia through the Bismarck Archipelago (1600 BC to 1200 BC), through central Melanesia (around 1200 BC), starting to enter Fiji and Western Polynesia around 1000 BC (Spriggs, 2006, pp.123-4).
[65] Burley, 2013, p.438.
[66] Geraghty, 2013, p.450.
[67] Sahlins, 1963, p.286.
[68] See Teaiwa (2014) on Banaban (Kiribati) people in Rabi, and Lifuka (1978) on Vaitupu (Tuvalu) people in Kioa.
[69] Geraghty, 2013.

system than even the Lau group (the Fijian islands geographically closest to Tonga). Vuna people, those claiming autochthony on account of their previous eminence which was overtaken later by western invaders, he writes are most 'inclined to the Polynesian type'.[70] And now I briefly turn to my second point about Fiji's culture-area emplacement – that many people in Taveuni continue to cite entangled histories as a mark of their 'mixed' identity.

Thus, the second reason for my theoretical caution is based on ethnographic grounds, as the ways in which people construct identity out of difference. Indeed, it was frequently pointed out to me that PNG was *different*, Fijians were peaceful, more Christian, less tribal, and the sight of guns in the streets of Port Moresby on the TV news was enough to make this an incontrovertible fact. Errington and Gewertz (2008, p.600) similarly note Fijians' propensity to contrast themselves favourably to PNG; the Fijian government's choice to ban mutton 'flaps' in 2000 signifying to many a stronger state, stronger bodily constitutions, and a more 'conscious' people that did not want to be – as they lamented of their Pacific neighbours – 'dumped' on by Western nations. As Abramson (1989, p.34) has pointed out, the 'marginalisation' of non-PNG anthropologists in the wider Melanesian literature thus posits a problem to the validity of Fiji's emplacement within this ethnographic region. Contrasting racial identities is not surprising, in a country where half of the population is of Indian descent (on account of the Girmit system of the late-19th and early 20th centuries). The ethnographic point is that what people tell you about who is different to them can tell you a lot about who *they think they are*. A salient, though unfortunate, point to add is that self-reflection often comes in a comparative mode that discomfortingly echoes anthropologists' historic evolutionism (in the form of both negative and positive appraisals of a community).

What, then, is the 'substance' of Pacific anthropology? Jolly's (1992) comparative work is instructive here, drawing on both historical and ethnographic data in Fiji and Vanuatu, it attempts to trace what Hirsch and Rollason (2024) call the prevailing essence of Pacific island life: an encompassment of layered descriptive frames in which people are constantly 'wrestling with the knottiness of their own presents'. History and ethnography in this way can dialogue.[71] Jolly (1992) highlights the divergent histories of colonialism and decolonialisation in Fiji and Vanuatu. Putting into question Strong's (2007, p.106) equivalence of modernity with rupture, Jolly (1992) finds two distinct socio-historical engagements with notions of tradition and continuity. In Vanuatu, emphasis is on cultural revivalism through *kastom* (custom, to counteract perceived cultural-historical rupture) whereas in Fiji an incorporative, processual notion of *vakavanua* (in the way of the land) allows a sense of continuity

[70] Hocart, 1952, p.5.
[71] Hirsch, 2014, p.55.

with the past, seamlessly encompassing historical transformation.[72] To political ends, she finds that *vakavanua* is integral in the 'rhetoric of the continuity of the past in the present' which underpins Fijian chiefly hierarchy,[73] and can be strategically deployed when traditional authority is threatened.[74] As she highlights, the *outsider* in the Vanuatu case are squarely colonialists, where in the Fiji case it is more complicated; it can be anyone who follows *the way of money* (including indigenous Fijians, but it is invariably Indo-Fijians).[75]

Jolly's study underlines the importance of viewing the relation to the past as a symbol of not only divergent history, but also emergent prospective engagements with the future. Ethnography has largely focused on the relationship of past to present,[76] which has cemented a problematic equivalence between continuity-tradition, as the direct opposite of change-modernity.[77] Anthropology's 'defensive posture' against modernity disallows the appearance of innovation and creativity as anything but *gradients* of acculturation and theorises these as always *of the past*.[78] Ethnographies of the future, instead, take seriously emic imaginaries and aspirations, wherein interlocutors' own frameworks of futurity challenge anthropological theorising constrained by a conservatism/progressive paradigm (related to the past).[79] This approach centres Pacific notions of place, mobility, and of the future as not 'simply a matter of temporality' but about what is exactly graspable, out-of-reach, and/or knowable by different ways of projecting oneself into this *space* through peoples' projects.

In conclusion, returning to the theme of loss, attention paid to the future is reflected in ethnographic attention paid to cultural theories of risk in light of climate change,[80] which are needed to address the science-society gap.[81] Recent analyses of climate discourse in the Pacific has highlighted issues of teleology and narrow frameworks for indigenous engagement.[82] Increasing anthropological attention has been paid to the issues of change,[83] hope,[84] and the *politics* and *technologies* of climate

[72] Toren, 1988, 1999. Note: A key point to add here is that Fiji and Vanuatu have a direct entanglement that reflects the starkness of their divergent historical experience, as the blackbirding era (1865-1911) brought Ni-Vanuatu and other Melanesians, primarily from Solomon Islands, PNG, and New Caledonia, to Fiji's shores to work on plantations in a policy that was underwritten by British notions of 'protectionism' of Fiji's indigenous population (Jolly, 1992, p.331, see also Lal, 1992, Tarte, n.d.).
[73] Jolly, 1992, p.347.
[74] See Schneider, 2014, on 'coup culture'.
[75] Jolly, 1992, p.345.
[76] Munn, 1992.
[77] Strathern, 2024.
[78] Rollason, 2014, pp.5-8.
[79] Lind, 2014.
[80] Rudiak-Gould, 2013.
[81] Finucane, 2009.
[82] DeLoughrey, 2019, Sillitoe, 2022, Nightingale et al., 2020, pp.345-6.
[83] Rudiak-Gould, 2013, Toren, 2010.
[84] Miyazaki, 2004.

prognosis.[85] These studies implicitly address the Western entwinement of 'nature' (as encompassing culture) and 'time' in a logic of finitude; both are said to be *running out*.[86] Inversely, disrupted *relations* are centred in ethnographic studies of climate causality amongst islanders,[87] with attendant cosmological concerns that connect past with present and fatalistic futures.[88] This literature review has thus highlighted indigenous modes of apprehending change, loss, and decline, which frequently challenge essentialised notions of land and personhood. Whilst these studies provide ways to apprehend climate relationality, few of these ethnographies balance an epistemological re-alignment – towards the future - with an attendance to the historical entanglements that persist and are indigenously reflected upon in culturally meaningful ways. Whilst Jolly's (1992) dialogic approach is useful - between kinds of relationship with the past - in glossing over Fiji's internal divergences (i.e. varied land alienation levels and intra-ethnic divisions) it risks perpetuating a static view of culture (as defined by its relationship to the past) instead of, as I argue in this thesis, emphasising the way the past comes to be perpetually defined *by* contemporary concerns over the future which are, as ever, highly varied and changeable.

Thesis' contribution

My thesis aims to contribute ethnographic and historical findings to the literature on land and its role in identity formation in Fiji. In preparing this project my intention had been to interrogate climate change perception, but in the process of fieldwork the primacy of issues of land were to take central importance. These chapters, then, reflect an inversion of sorts, as the topic of land is explored through oral history, contemporary exchange, and farming methods, to finally end with a discussion of climate change as but one aspect of social, moral, and ecological concern. The evolution of research questions, as well as responses to these is, of course, part of the iterative process of ethnography in which context and the personal interplay to produce what *became*.

My primary contribution lies within the anthropology of the Pacific, in which the dialectic of modernity and tradition has persisted and continues to play a central role in identity-formation amongst islanders. This binary insinuates a modernity (in the form of entwined technologies, practices, beliefs, and – as above – a particular temporal configuration) that is always *just around the corner*, which has been critiqued by its allowance of only two choices to islanders: resist or yield, disallowing an ability to

[85] Bollig, 2018, p.91-2, Tambridge, D'Arcy, and Mawyer, 2021, p.350.
[86] Crook, 2024.
[87] Crook and Rudiak-Gould, 2018.
[88] Jacka, 2009.

produce 'the new'.[89] In this research, I will explore the ways in which islanders self-consciously employ this dialectic in the process of identity formation, thereby creating 'the new' in forms of the 'old'. Problematising these categories, I will show how, following Sahlins (1993b, p.25), *syncretism* functions to consume contradiction, as one finds 'continuity in change, tradition in modernity, even custom in commerce'. Reflexively engaging this systematic condition, interlocutors both reify and critique these arrangements, and in doing so engage a 'culturally specific mode of change' that puts the past *in front* (*i liu*, lit. in the front, before). In focusing on this temporal dialectic, thus, I take an approach inspired by Pacific historiography, that complicates linear claims and allows for the possibility 'that the past can be read, seen, heard, and felt in the *future'*.[90]

I follow Chappell's (1995, p.303) notion of historiography as 'the last colonial frontier, a kind of dysfunctional family reunion', wherein the past continues to haunt the present in often delimiting ways. Decolonising revisionism in Pacific history has led historians to 'upstream' agency through time which reflects a recourse to a dialectic of agency/passivity that is reflected in contemporary climate discourse which presupposes victimhood, and thereby, passivity. Again, the relationship of agency to time is central, as islands are made an anachronistic allegory within climate discourse, the globe's 'anticipated future' and 'vanishing past'.[91] In this study, then, I will follow Crook and Rudiak-Gould's (2018, p.17) situating of Pacific islanders at the 'confluence of agency and disempowerment', and Chappell (1995, p.315), in his conclusion that it is indeed possible to speak of agency and victimisation at the same time, being 'entangled and mutable, not discrete'. This contribution, thus, applies the dominant dialectic of Pacific historiography within contemporary discourses on exchange, markets, farming methods, and climate change.

My second contribution falls within the anthropology of climate change and 'reception studies', specifically regarding climate's temporal dimensions.[92] I aim to build on the insights from 'reception studies' to ask how visions of Oceanic futurities are connected to, and captured by, climate change's discursive force. To do this, I will particularly focus on the ways the future is infused with visions of the past, therein strengthening 'traditionalism' in its contrast to modernity's social, ecological, and moral failures.[93] My early research plans were defined by reception studies' focus on scale and related idioms: translation, appropriation, localisation, and corroboration. Whilst an intended multi-sited

[89] Clifford, 1987.
[90] Hanlon, 2003, p.28.
[91] DeLoughrey, 2019, p.166 and p.179.
[92] See Rudiak-Gould, 2011, 2013.
[93] Rudiak-Gould, 2013.

approach was dropped after months of false-starts, logistical difficulties, and the affective reality of time constraints on building rapport, fragments of this initial plan remain.

The temporality of climate change harbours attendant conceptions of risk and the future which are negotiated by islanders, who often draw on wide sources of dis/confirmation that may include social, ethical, and political referents from a wide temporal scale. Land, and importantly the indigenous ownership of it, is entwined with conceptions of time that evoke a sense of continuity between past and present.[94] Thus, in this period of 'going back', focusing on land provided fertile ground to investigate enduring legacies of the past and visions of the future. The *risk*, inadvertently, of the weight of climate change discourse is that 'at-risk' places come to localise climate change (the *island* as synecdoche), but under an assumed ontology of vulnerability that limits the 'ongoing conditions of possibility' of other framings.[95] As my focus on land developed, a remnant of my initial study appeared again - the idea that environments are both objects *of* translation and similarly translate *subjects* in ways that both permit and inhibit possible futures. In this way, whilst this study became 'single sited' it remained multitudinous, concentrating on the ways sites and subjects are made and remade every day and wherein the past continues to pervade in everyday life and meaning making.

Underlying these contributions is an implicit reckoning with binary categorisations of order and disorder that seek to contain but persistently invite resistance. These resistances take on hauntological aspects of varied form, the colonial codification of *tradition* and *land* which invite contemporary indeterminacies of rightful ownership (Chapter 1), the leakage of different moral framings of property exchange (Chapter 2), the framing of the entrepreneur in communal society (Chapter 3), the lingering, seeping chemicals of agricultural growth encompassed within a land-based theology (Chapter 4), and in the final chapter, a more explicit focus on time that asks how indigenous, climate, Fijian, Biblical, and other eschatologies overlap, contrast, conflict, and entangle (Chapter 5). To explore these topics, I will engage the following two central research questions:

- How is the past employed to frame contemporary socio-moral concerns in Taveuni during a period of environmental decline?

- How do farmers' imaginaries of the past and future impact upon the ways in which they manage environmental decline in the present?

[94] de Wit and Haines, 2021, p.11.
[95] Baldacchino, 2006, p.9.

Structure of thesis

I will trace various aspects of land, which can be distinguished into tenses: the past (oral histories of the land), the present (the land's fertility and the exchange of crops), and the future (an eschatology of the land). In each ethnographic chapter, these temporal orientations remain entangled and co-constitutive, reflective of interlocutors' manner of speaking about land where temporality is refracted in ways that can simultaneously compress, elongate, and merge the past, present, and future. In so doing, I aim to highlight the central role of temporal oppositionality – and mutability - as part of identity formation. Rather than discrete parts, then, past-present-future are entangled in ways that are self-consciously drawn on to formulate, variously (and non-exhaustively): pasts that bolster present self-image, presents that negatively compare with past eminence, and futures that morally judge the present. In exploring different aspects of land, then, I will incorporate both historical data and future imaginaries as part of the ethnographic scene. The first is done through engagement with historical literature and archival research, whilst the second – future imaginaries - is more complicated, it seeps its way into each chapter as an underlying, sometimes explicit, often contradictory dialectic between undetermined, open futures and fatalistic, end of days narratives. This enduring tension will come to a head in the final chapter, which will focus on the moral and temporal politics of climate change.

In Chapter 1, I will introduce the Fijian philosophy of reproducing indeterminacies of the land. Through oral history I will show how interlocutors in Taveuni challenge the 'black and white' of colonial-era records, concretised genealogies, and entitled land claims. A philosophical foundation of indeterminism, thus, shifts the notion of history as in the past, but rather as unresolved, opening up possibilities of the present and future that occupy the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, this philosophy is played out in the everyday movements of farmers in Taveuni across new and old borders, which complicate discrete notions of property. I will connect these everyday border crossings with broader questions regarding moral economies. The elision of cultural categories of exchange, further inspired by a spate of recent crop theft, draws on notions of communal pasts and commercial presents that make for complicated and contested modes of cultural critique and identity-formation.

In Chapter 3, the ways in which interlocutors engage cultural critique, and therein draw on visions of the past, will be explored through the specific social role of the middleman. This economic figure acts as a bridge between *inside and outside* of the island, between *tradition* and *modernity*. Historically an 'alien' - whether European, Chinese, or otherwise - they can now no longer claim alterity, and their dichotomous identity as both insider and outsider reflects in the hope and suspicion they incite.

Therein, the evolution of this figure will also trace the possibilities of class formation in view of historical, colonial codifications of racial economic determinism.

In Chapter 4, the fertility of the land will be directly addressed as farmers lament a declining soil that suggests an attendant socio-spiritual decline. The past will again be used as a resource as the individualised agrochemical-centric view of prosperity is put in competition with a *vanua*-centric ideal of ecological harmony. Where overlaps with Edenic visions are consciously employed, a synthesis of indigenous belief and Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si', which speaks of ecological conversion, produces a form of land stewardship that highlights the ongoing entanglements of past-present-future wherein modernity is *re*-presented as original sin in the form of 'the chemical'. 'The chemical', as it is colloquially termed in Taveuni, is commonly used when speaking of conventional, highly toxic pesticides (such as glyphosate) and accompanying synthetic fertilisers (such as NPK – nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium - blends), rather than available organic alternatives.

In Chapter 5, future imaginaries will take central importance, as moral reckonings played out every day in farmers' lives come to be defined by both the near and imagined far-future. The integration of Fijian and Christian eschatology reaches its zenith but does not entirely entwine. Where Biblical prophecy speaks of finality and apocalypticism, indeterminacies of the land remain, making the near future a morally fecund time. In redefining waiting as neither passive nor ambivalent, then, a Fijian conception of time suggests a method for environmental pragmatism to coexist with fatalism through, rather than in spite of, faith.

Methodology

Rationale for the selection of field sites

When I arrived in Taveuni I embedded myself in Wairiki, living in a lean-to between *'na car wash',* previously a carwash (now a fish parcel stand) and a building called *'na tea',* previously a tea shop (and before that a Chinese-owned Quong Tiy shop). My place was sometimes called *'vale-ni-ika'* (the fish-house) because a man had sold fish here before. The settlement, backing out on to the Somosomo Strait, comprised two shops, a derelict cinema, an occasional vegetable market stall, and a couple of small fish parcel stands. In finding my field sites, the anthropological mix of serendipity and agency were at play, with my Suva friends having connections in both the settlements surrounding Tavuki in the middle of the island, just up a hill from Wairiki, and Vuna, in the far south of the island, these two villages having a long, entwined history (to be explored in Chapter 1). In a *post-hoc* reading, I see now that through focusing on the south of the island, I could similarly follow movements that came to define my study: following taro in one direction (towards Salia jetty near to Wairiki) and the movement of farmers and middlemen in the other (towards the many freehold/leasehold farms in the south near Vuna). Thus, the multi-sited network was at once a function of economic process, but also of kin networks and pre-colonial polities (see Figure 2).[96]

Figure 2. Photographs of field sites. Top left: Narusa settlement looking down towards Somosomo Strait. Top right: A farmhouse in Naiyalayala estate with *yaqona* plants in the foreground. Bottom Left: Taro farm. Bottom right: Holy Cross church in Wairiki.

[96] Between January 2023 – June 2024, 9 months were spent in Taveuni in the Northern District of Fiji, with a further 3 months spent in Suva undertaking interviews and archival research. The first few months were also spent in Suva, attaining appropriate permits, undertaking language classes, preparatory research, and interviews. A follow up in April 2025 was spent predominantly in Taveuni.

The first phase of my research was spent in the settlements surrounding Wairiki, overlooked by the Holy Cross Catholic church, especially in the settlement of Narusa, which extended from the back of the grounds of the church up a steep incline, a wooded place formerly said to be where students would sneak away *up to no good*. 'Vietnam, they call it, real grog fuckers up there', one lady said, as I made one of frequent trips up to the settlement. Most members were opportunistic farmers from elsewhere; the settlement being attached to the village of Tavuki across a steep riverine gorge and comprised of those whose ancestors moved to the area for the school. Others held jobs in the local shops or nearby resorts or took occasional construction work that popped up around the island. Many made money by selling goods within the village. One time, sitting with a group of ladies, they commented: 'the samosas are going up, the cake down', pointing to the kids passing each other holding trays of baked goods to sell.

In the second phase of my research, as farmers' concerns about the fertility of the soil became central to my understanding of the perceived trajectory of the island, I spent more time in the south where there were more 'big farmers'. I again stayed on land belonging to my Suva 'grandma' (*Nau*), on the outside of the village along the coastal dirt road which connected Vuna with a neighbouring village, and along which farms were dotted. This proximity but also relative distance allowed me to spend more time in the surrounding settlements where on account of the large tract of alienated land in this area, many farmers either leased or owned portions of farmland. It was also one of the main places on the island Fijians and Indo-Fijians both lived. My study sites were, thus, a diverse mix of village and settlement: native, leasehold, and freehold land, allowing me to move across Taveuni's mosaic of land types every day. Focusing on the area between Wairiki and Vuna had other benefits, which I will outline here.

1. Level of commercialisation: The southern settlements have a higher proportion of farmers on freehold land, or leasehold land on large estates (Salialevu and Ura) as tenant farmers, paying a crop share rent (some pay monetarily). This arrangement is less common in the middle of the island, where there is a mix of native and freehold land only. In this way, the extent to which commercialisation of land impacts upon environmental perception could be explored.

2. Religion: The settlements in the middle of the island are predominantly Catholic. On the other hand, in the south, there is a larger amount of diversity: Methodists, 7th-Day Adventists, and Hindus being the most common. Within the Wairiki settlements that I originally embedded myself within, I met many Catholics who connected their faith with land issues,

often drawing on *Laudato Si'*. I sought to explore further how faith impacted upon their perceptions of risk and, in turn, their farming practices.

3. Environmental discourse: I made research visits in Wairiki to the nearby Ministry of Agriculture extension office, TeiTei Taveuni (a local farming NGO), and Tutu Rural Training Centre (a youth farming training centre), all of which have a considerable voice in environmental discourse on the island. The surrounding settlements had more direct and frequent interactions with these centres than did the south of the island. In turn, moving from the 'centre' of the environmental discourse to the southern end allows for an exploration of how environmental awareness, education, and outreach influences perceptions of climate risk, vulnerability, and resilience.

4. Climate: In Vuna, which had been hit much harder by Cyclone Winston than the central part of the island, there remains the physical testaments to destruction, in some cases, only *yavus* (house foundations) remain, waiting to be rebuilt upon when a family decides. The varied experiences of extreme weather such as Winston, and the different environmental stresses put on each community regarding freshwater availability become sources of distinguishment between communities.

5. Race: The south of the island had more Indo-Fijian farmers staying on leasehold and freehold plots, especially around the Qarawalu and Delaivuna settlements in the south. I visited these interior settlements to do surveys using snowball sampling after having visited with taro buyers. The interior roads were often poor, bumpy, and with heavy rains could be unpassable. The racial sentiments that attached to road quality and spatiality permitted greater understanding of the ways in which contemporary concerns reference historical, land-based segmentations.

Research Approach & Methods

In total I undertook semi-structured interviews with thirty-seven farmers from three villages and ten settlements and completed environmental perceptions surveys with farmers who farmed native (nine), leasehold (five), and freehold (nine) lands. Across these sites I tried to ascertain a diversity of views; in ethnicity, faith, farming units, gender, and age, to study farmers' perceptions of the past and future across intersecting lines.

Within the province (*yasana*) of Cakaudrove I undertook research in two districts (*tikina*): Cakaudrove and Vuna (see Table 1 for demographics of Taveuni). After receiving ethical approval from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Provincial Council of Cakaudrove, and the Roko Tui Cakaudrove, I was permitted to

visit the village. I was met by either the *turaga-ni-koro* (village headman) or *mata-ni-vanua* (village spokesperson) who took me to the home of the *Tui* (Chief). There I presented my *isevusevu*, a bundle of yaqona roots, and asked for permission to conduct my research in their *Vanua*. My *isevusevu*, written in iTaukei with the aid of my language tutor, simultaneously asks for permission and apologises for any unwittingly unacceptable behaviour (see Appendix 1 for *isevusevu* text). Asking for permission in this way is *ivalala vakavanua* (acceptable protocols in the way of the land). Nabobo-Baba (2008) has written of the *Vanua* Research Framework that indigenous protocols, knowledge practices, processes of ethics, and the Fijian traditional structure become the organising principles of practice, whereby all other methods are dictated by these lines of correct engagement. She writes:

> '*Knowledge is seen as a gift by Fijians; hence within the frame of Vanua research the gift is sought for and derived accordingly. Research…is infused by values of reciprocity, respect for the knowledge givers or depositories, loloma (love) and empathy that is mutual care and commitment to the researched people's welfare.'*[97]

Lagi (2015) adapted the *Vanua* Research Framework for her context in Ovalau, deriving inspiration from an endemic coconut (*Na Bu ni Ovalau*), the name of which denotes both a young coconut and a reciprocal gift *(na bu)* given by children to story tellers to thank them for their work. The coconut 'will grow only in Nasinu [village] and has to be replanted and nurtured in a special way in order for it to grow', suggestive of the intimate way in which methodological framework is derived from, first-and-foremost, the *vanua* in which one works, in much the same way as children are reflections of their upbringing within the *vanua (lutu na niu lutu ki vuna).* This framework follows similar principles of reciprocity and respect for epistemological practices to avoid *kudru ni vanua*, the anger of the land. Whilst I cannot adopt these research frameworks fully, as I am neither indigenous nor a fluent speaker of iTaukei, I attempted to follow some of their precepts that foreground the relational ontology of the *vanua*; engaging respect (*veidokai*), mutual respect (*veivakarokorokotaki*), and trust (*veivakabauti*).

	Vuna	**Cakaudrove**	**Wainikeli**
Villages	*3*	*6*	*8*
Settlements	*16*	*23*	*25*
Estates	*5*	*2*	*3*
Population	*4,104*	*7,729*	*3,596*
- **of which farmers**	*2,010*	*4,101*	*974*

Table 1: Three districts of Taveuni (data from the Ministry of Agriculture Extension Office, Taveuni). Approximately 75% of people are iTaukei (National Census, 2017).

[97] Nabobo-Baba, 2008, p.146.

After attaining this ethical access to each village, the mode of entry (*katuba*, lit. one's *door*) one took could have a large impact on the research process; indeed, in one case, where my one connection with a village turned out to be particularly weak (the son of a friend, who in fact lived in his farmhouse a mile outside of the village), I ended up staying with the *mata-ni-vanua* (spokesman), a relatively 'official' mode of entry which proved to be incompatible with my fieldwork aims and, upon his leaving the village for a period of time, made returning a difficult and, in the end, fruitless task. Interestingly, one's door of entry in the village limits the possibility of engaging with it in another way (indeed, I could not *move* houses), and thus it unravels in a relatively prescribed manner; suggesting that 'serendipity' is restricted in the ways it can manifest.[99]

In undertaking the *isevusevu*, one is asking acceptance on multiple planes; the Chief being the voice for all that is within their *Vanua*.[100] Multiple times after a *sevusevu* I was told variations of: '*You are free now, you can go anywhere, and nothing bad will happen to you'.* In all the villages that I visited except for two I was allowed to do the *sevusevu* that I had prepared. In one, the village spokesman (*mata-ni-vanua*) – the brother of my housemate - was adamant that he would do it for me, even after I said I would prefer to fully explain my purpose in the village. In the end, deferring to his position as elder in the village was necessary, though it hindered my attempt to make a meaningful connection with the Chief of the village in this instance. In the second case, my friend - a *vasu* of the village (her maternal village) - called upon her relative who was the village headman to conduct the *sevusevu* at the Chief's house.

Methods: from 'talking about nothing in particular' to surveys

In the following, I want to detail the spectrum of methods used over the span of my fieldwork to both outline research progression but also to suggest the underlying daily dialectics at play in fieldwork; between openness/focus and participating/'just experiencing'.[101] During the early weeks and months

[99] See Tilche and Simpson, 2017 for description of 'the agency of that field in making what we can know' in Gujarat. Lindstrom (1991, p.127, 197-199) has similarly discussed agentic capacity in Tanna, Vanuatu in terms of 'roads' into field-sites, his own being 'Christian roads' which led to him living in Presbyterian hamlet and which highly impacted his ability to have 'serious' talk with interlocutors from a neighbouring village.

[100] The *vanua* is the holistic Fijian concept of land as relationality, community, morality, and custom, which 'contains the actuality of one's past and the potentiality of one's future... [it is] an extension of the concept of the self' (Tuimavana, 2020, p.81). It refers 'to people, land, sea, traditions and customs, traditional status and leadership, relationships, space, spirit, silence, respect and honour that is accorded to every part of the land and every relationship among all living things' (Lagi, 2015, p.14).

[101] DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p.92.

of my fieldwork, I frequently engaged in wide-ranging and often kava-centric *talanoa*, which is a widely referenced Pacific island conversation style; defined as 'talking about nothing in particular',[102] it is also used to deliberate on issues: '[it] goes round in circles; it does not follow a straight line, aiming towards a final decision like many Western processes'.[103] As Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014) have argued, *talanoa* differs from informal interviewing as the intersubjective empathy demanded by relational methodologies also takes into account cultural difference which 'empathy' alone cannot encompass. In this regard, it requires not only openness to empathising, but also learning *how* to empathise, within specific cultural contexts. Indeed, this methodological insight seems to expand on Robbins' (2013) thesis that anthropology's focus on the 'suffering subject' began as part of the postmodern project of de-othering, but that in the process cultural difference across subjects was largely voided. My study aimed to draw on his 'anthropology of the good', then, focusing on the linked concepts of time, change, and hope. These questions operated in more a productive way within *talanoa*, where dwelling on negative topics was neither socially desirable nor productive methodologically. Indeed, the data gleaned from *talanoa* is, it has been argued, more 'trustworthy', but not more 'reliable', as notions of *reliability* can change over time, with different groups; and is reflective of the non-expectation of 'honesty' within *talanoa's* semantic boundaries. *Talanoa's* 'unserious' nature, then, requires careful consideration of not only the story being told, but also the setting and the storyteller, to gauge its relative merits.[104]

During grog sessions I would not actively take notes, inappropriate as it seemed to have a pen and paper out, though I did on occasion signal that if something was of interest I may write it down. When I review my notes from the many circles I sat in, I recognise a tendency towards logocentrism that is a function of both the relatively sedentary nature of grog drinking and my own mode of observation being biased towards the *wordy*. A contributing factor may also be the fact that my notetaking often followed hours of drinking, meaning that I was often exhausted and kept physical descriptions to a minimum, fearful I would forget salient points people had made. That is not to say, however, that there are not many worthwhile non-verbal aspects of grog drinking to be observed which signify deeper social meaning: there are the attempts to 'smack' someone who is just passing by, their attempts – sometimes in the form of running away - to excuse themselves, and the eventual succumbing to the will of the group; they change their plans, they sit. The performativity of repulsion-and-resignation is

[102] Tagicakiverata and Nilan, 2018.
[103] Robinson and Robinson, 2005 p.15. Note: Its promoted use at Fiji's COP 23 brought it to worldwide attention.
[104] See Vaioleti, 2016.

so strong that I have even seen it copied almost exactly in a 'juice party' when the local church had initiated a ban (*tabu*) on kava for two months.

Whilst listening and struggling to understand, trying to remember things people had said, and, often in vain, aiming to keep up with the demands of consistent grog-drinking, I began to realise that my efforts mirrored that which the young farmers I was speaking to lamented. The requirement to be part of the social activities of the village meant that many a night was lost to endless kava drinking, resulting in being heavily 'grog-doped' ('high' on kava), and making it highly unlikely that you would make it out to the farm the next morning before the heat of the sun made it unbearable. The balance young farmers must maintain between farm work and the work of social capital will form a recurrent theme in the ethnographic chapters below as the 'invisible cycle of daily life' jostles against projects of self-determination.[105] In my case, rapport-building through *grog-doping* made it unlikely I would be awake early to do any interviews or undertake participant observation in farms, which I had deemed to be essential to answer my research questions. I attempted, though often failed, to be conscientious of people's cultural obligations to me (as a *vulagi*) in this regard, as the following brief episode highlights.

> *Fieldnotes, Narusa, 5th December 2023*
>
> *At one point as we begin grogging Epeli turns to me:*
>
> *'It's only for you that I am grogging'*
>
> *Vili and Epeli say it would be considered rude if they 'ran away' and a visitor wanted to grog. Epeli talked about how he had planned to go to the farm yesterday, but a family member of our mutual friend Dals had come from the neighbouring village and the day had been lost to grog-drinking.*
>
> *I feel slightly sheepish, I say:*
>
> *'Well, I hope you are happy to grog', timidly.*
>
> *Epeli replies:*
>
> *'I am not happy to grog, but I am happy you are here'.*

My sense that I was trapped within a temporal loop that inhibited my ability to 'do research' was an embodiment of the cultural landscape, where individual concerns over one's time or privacy came below the need to accommodate others and prioritise communal will. Grog drinking highlighted in this way some of the key differences between individualistic and communal cultures' ways of negotiating

[105] Jones and McVerry, 2012, p.9.

and saying 'no', which produce some incongruent moments or fieldwork dilemmas.[106] The difficulty I was experiencing in getting to the farms to *talanoa* as I had wanted was one of a few physical *embodiments* of the research site that I was taking on. After months of consuming grog and waking up with little energy, the lack of focus (or in its inverse; my openness to village life) began to challenge my sense of *making progress*.

In the final months of fieldwork, when I decided to be more systematic in my approach, I had to pull myself back from the nightly grog sessions, which put more distance between myself and the people I had grown close to. I was getting 'more done' with targeted semi-structured interviews and environmental surveys but simultaneously alienating myself; an experience that many farmers had told me reflected their moves to their mountainous farmhouses *(vale-ni-teitei).* Whilst an NGO worker I spoke to in Suva pointed out that part of why farmers stay up in their farms is that virgin soils are further afield, I was more used to hearing these moves being framed in the positive aspect; as freeing oneself from socio-cultural obligations. In the village, there was the ever-present risk that one's well-made plans would be way-laid by other obligations: as one elder, Mosese, put it: 'When you go to the farm, if you see them building their house there, you don't just walk past. You are going to stop. You put down your knife, what you take to the farm, and go help. Farm can wait, another day'. In turn, my attempts to formalise research were both a method to dis/confirm notions built up after months of participant observation and *talanoa*, but also a way to focus my *time*.

I undertook structured surveys comprising of around twenty questions (see Appendix 2).[107] Surveys were used to home in on ethnographic themes identified after around six months of participant observation. In turn, the questionnaires were designed to invite specific reflections on the prevailing themes of soil quality, livelihood resilience, weather patterns, environmental risks, and views on climate change. More quantitative questions (such as export crop yields, monthly household spend, and quantity of agrochemicals used) were employed to identify potential patterns between environmental perception, labour, and economic activity that may have been harder to identify through ethnographic interviewing alone. These findings could then be followed up in less formal settings with interlocutors I had grown close to around my fish-house in Wairiki and in the settlements on Salialevu Road in the south. My initial sampling method thus was to identify the people I was closest to and ask them to undertake what was, at the time, a lengthy questionnaire which might last up to two-three hours depending on response times. Following this, revisions were made to the questionnaire based on some of these experiences, and snowball sampling was employed with

[106] DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p.68.
[107] The survey was available in both iTaukei and English, though all my interlocutors chose to complete it in English.

demography in mind (my closest interlocutors largely being iTaukei males), identifying more Indo-Fijians and women to survey.

In total, 26 surveys were undertaken, 15 being in the south (in the settlements of Navaca, Waimaqera, Qarawalu, Delaivuna, and the village of Vuna) and 11 in the central east of the island (in the settlements surrounding Wairiki and in the village of Tavuki). The majority were administered by me using a tape recorder to record responses, as well as notetaking. In a small number of cases, respondents filled out the questionnaires themselves due to logistical issues. My aim was not to be representative of each settlement/village (which could number anywhere between 50-300 people, for example Tavuki village is made up of 72 households), but rather to get a wide breadth of input from a diversity of settlements/villages, iTaukei/Indo-Fijians, males-females, and land tenure types.[108] The small sample size should further suggest that my intention was not to undertake comparative analysis, but rather to balance questions in the vein of ethnographic interviewing with quantitative data in a way that might elucidate unseen correlations that could then be further investigated ethnographically.

Some of the questions, such as that which asked individuals to explain their land tenure arrangement, appear in the survey as quantitative (between indigenous/leasehold/freehold) but often incited the telling of long histories of engagement. This signals the level of fluidity and complexity in the spatiality of farmlands in Taveuni, but also in the problems of defining tenure in the given categories. In one case, I had finished a survey with two interlocutors who had told me that their farmland was 'native' land. Later, when we were discussing their family history and paternal ties to Vanua Levu, they remarked that their grandfathers in their *yavusa* (tribe) had come to Taveuni in the 1970s and bought this land for them, with the help of the esteemed former President Ratu Penaia Ganilau. I paused and asked if this meant that their land was freehold, to which they nodded. I made sure to correct this in the survey, but their initial answer had revealed a processual way of thinking of land 'reverting' in one sense back to 'native' land, as it was their *yavusa* (tribe) that had bought the land for the good of their children and grandchildren. In this way, the survey's rigid categories constrained more fluid definitions of land tenure, where land could be both 'native' and 'freehold' at the same time (to be explored further, especially Chapter 2). Later still, when I accompanied this family to their farm, I found that

[108] I achieved this spread to varying degrees (numbers of participants in brackets). Ethnically: iTaukei (18), Indo-Fijian (7), Part-European (1). Sex: male (20), female (6). The respondents farmed: freehold land (9), freehold/leasehold mix (2), leasehold (2), *mataqali* (9), *mataqali*/leasehold mix (1). All respondents from the central east settlements/village farmed only on *mataqali* land except for one who farmed a *mataqali*/leasehold mix. The average age of respondent was 53, a factor of both my contacts skewing towards older people and the hierarchical basis of Fijian society which privileges elders to speak in such 'formal' settings.

they were now farming on leasehold land in one of the local estates, as the freehold, tribe-owned farmland had been intensively farmed for decades and was 'resting'.

Other questions which sought simple responses (for example, ranking environmental risks from most worrisome to least), could well be rejected by respondents who deemed parsing out risks irrelevant in managing for unpredictability, or as worldly hubris that suggested that I thought these were in some way preventable. One respondent commented that as a farmer one had to plan for all risks, and that they were inevitable. Indeed, over the course of doing surveys many methods for engaging with the parameters of set questions were employed by people, for example: a) rejecting the framing, b) constructing experience in ways that match the framing's demands, or c) reformulating the question.[109] In Chapter 5, I will pick back up on such ostensibly fatalistic responses to environmental risk and connect these to various framings of human agency in relation to divine will that speak to the ability of one to *influence* the future. In this farmer's response, it was his pragmatism rather than his fatalism, however, that he emphasised in rejecting the question; he expected everything and, thus, was ready for anything. In this way, data gleaned from the varied modes of engagement with questions gave further insight – and indeed often challenged my presuppositions – on what is deemed important to discuss. Indeed, in a more profound sense – through rejection, refusal, and subversion – it illuminated what can be made into discrete categories and what is known through process and praxis. In turn, these responses contribute to discussions of cultural theories of risk and thus what respondents claim is *knowable* and what is *unknowable* (see Chapter 5). In turn, the ethnographic claims I make from the data on weather, climate, and risk perception are informed by *how* – rather than necessarily *what* – one knows about these topics.

Whilst these responses suggest the limits of questionnaires to encompass diverse lifeworlds, they do also point to productive moments of disharmony which turn questioning itself into ethnographic insight. The ethnographic claims that can be made from these questionnaires encompass, thus, subversion as one form of engagement amongst others. Indeed, allowing space for responses to develop – such as in the question of whether the weather has been the 'same' or 'different' this year to previous years – invited not only a reflection on the weather, but also an appraisal of 'difference' and what it meant for specific people and projects; for example, one woman needed more sunshine and less rain for her screen-printing business than she had received this year, another pointing to the increase in boils (*vorovoro*) on the skin of children as a sign of the heat, whilst still others suggested the year had been good for farming as it was 'very hot, very wet'. I emphasise this diversity to argue that generalisability and specificity – between categories and freeform, quantitative and qualitative

[109] Galasinski and Kozłowska, 2010.

data – can both be productively engaged in undertaking ethnographically informed surveys. However, to be effective, the thematic focus must be defined indigenously through a period of fieldwork, after which questionnaires can both consolidate and produce new areas of tension. Where categories continue to be acceded, and discussion seeps into ostensibly closed-form questions, I could take these as signs that my conceptual containers (i.e. of risks or 'difference') were insufficient to hold the complexity which lingers on the margins of interpretation (which clearly remains a concern).

Throughout the research I employed participant observation, which differed from the more sedentary, logocentric methods above, and indeed often alleviated some of the more uncomfortable effects of excessive stasis. Dancing during grog sessions, for one, allowed for moments of 'just experiencing',[111] but also indicated communal logics that pressed against this sense of *transcendence*, as the act is more for the audience than the dancer; my housemate telling me at the end of one night: 'You entertained them, *that's* the most important thing'. Participation in the form of entertaining becomes an act of reciprocation and, accordingly, an insight into the communal values that underpin such gatherings. Roles in other settings invariably differed, and spanned the participant-observation spectrum; on the farm I was apprentice, though my inability to provide root-crops for my neighbours (central as it is to notions of manliness) meant my recourse to store-bought goods and electronics from the city was a way to reciprocate (meaning: participate) in the only way I had; outside of the expectations of men (seasonal crops) and women (hosting duties); where I, as a *vulagi*, fell into neither side easily.

In the truck with taro buyers, my main role was to keep them company; my interest in the taro industry had been established by previously attained approvals from the bosses at the three major taro buying businesses on the island, and in turn my curiosity was seen as potentially less personal and more legible to staff. This legibility, of myself as student, was also aided by the spatiality of the truck; with our eyes fixed ahead with a purposeful destination our conversations flowed easily. In many instances I was given the job of calculating the total weight of the sacks and the total to be paid to the farmer, depending on that day's price of taro. There was never outright argument in these instances, even on the occasion that the buyer would round-down the number of kilograms on looking at the scale and the farmer suggested it be rounded up, this was silently accepted. I knew, however, from various conversations that the role of the middlemen and the buyers in Taveuni was often criticised in private: 'they are playing around with the farmers', a common refrain. I was also aware that being regularly seen with them might be seen as a tacit allegiance. In one case, a farmer came to the warehouse of Robert, and he got up quickly from our meal as we were talking. Another man turned to me: 'there is

[111] DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p.92.

a time for sitting and *talanoa*, when there is something in front of him, don't try to *talanoa'*, he said, apologetically. When he returned, he told me that farmer had come from the south of the island as he was worried the buyers were 'messing around' with the farmers, 'always about money', Robert says, sighing. My displayed interest in the taro industry was not without further potential issues, key amongst them was the idea that I was interested in going into business. Reciprocal engagements are essential aspects of participant observation but similarly requires a constant negotiation of both communal values and interpersonal expectations. In this section I hope to have shown that the daily dialectics which define the methods I have described are felt affectively, rather than theoretically, and therein reflect some of the same inter-subjective tensions held by my interlocutors.

Challenges to research methods

I will briefly detail two main research challenges that arose during my fieldwork; related to essentialism and epistemological framing. In exploring these, I aim to highlight that discussions of positionality deepen inter-subjective understanding and, in turn, allows for an examination of how one's identity impacts upon their observations.[112]

> *Paul: 'Ah that's why you're going around at night, because your people used to own all of this. Fiji was all Britain.'*

My personal identity as a British man in Fiji has obvious implications for the kinds of access I am afforded as well as the way I am indexed within long histories of engagement with *vulagi*. The above quote, said somewhat incredulously, is suggestive of the ways my cycling along the road at night was perceived within a deep temporal framework of colonial history. Other, uncertain associations are also indicative of the processes of essentialism external to the researcher. In one instance I was mistook as a member of a new religious movement that had, in the 1980s, purchased an island a few hours boat ride from Taveuni, the confusion reinforced by the fact the compound adjacent to my lean-to was often used as a quarantine for Fijians who worked on the island. In yet another instance, a previously stand-offish man had commented that when I first appeared 'I thought you were with Agriculture', meaning the Ministry of Agriculture, with whom he had very little time for. Clearly my positionality shifted after these initial misperceptions, but their underlying impulses highlight divergent ways that white *vulagi* are first incorporated into the scene.

[112] DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p.96.

Asenaca: '*We are lucky to have you around… when the Fijians go to Israel, the rain will fall*'.[113]

The essentialism that proved most discomforting, however, had much to do with news feeding in from TV screens and mobile phones. My non-religious Jewish identity had proved to be beneficial in building rapport with many for whom a belief in the sacredness of Israel is integral, even whilst my relative *lack* of integration of this part of my ancestry resulted in occasional feelings that what grew into intimacy could also feel like deception. In one *yaqona* sitting, one man – whilst asking after my partner's faith and 'lapsed' Catholicism - singled out myself and the *mata-ni-vanua* (village spokesman), a man who had been a UN peacekeeper in the 1980s, as 'those who had been to Israel' and could 'teach' others.

Interlocutors frequently drew equivalences between Israel and Fiji; from the trivial (the eating of leftovers) to the social ('we talk like we knew each for a long time') to the structural (the roles within Fijian villages evidence of a link to the ancient twelve tribes of Israel).[114] This equivalence, Newland (2015) has shown, was particularly drawn on in the time of Rabuka's 1987 coup, when the 'Lost Tribes' theory was taken as a motif for iTaukei ethno-religious nationalism. She remarks that the 'emotional pull of Exodus' and of 'persecuted Israelites' have been used in the wider Pacific in many land disputes and dispossessions.[115] Indeed, one of my interlocutors, a worker at an NGO in Suva, likened the experience of Fijians who emigrate abroad to the Jewish people, a people left wandering without a sense of belonging. My interest in land issues seemed to further confirm this fundamental connection and validated not only my emplacement but also the theory's *rightness,* if not truthfulness.[116]

As the conflict in Gaza developed in late-2023 and throughout 2024, however, the ways in which I was essentialised began to provoke internal tensions regarding commitments to anthropological neutrality. A sampling of references to the war should provide a general sense of the mood:

> *Salote: 'The Jews will keep on fighting wars until the end of the world. They won't stop, they won't stop. Because it's written, it's a sign.'*

[113] A group of Fijian members of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem happened to be visiting Israel as part of the Feast of Tabernacles (*sukkot*) when 7 October 2023 took place. Their arrival on a chartered flight heralded the first time a Fiji Airways plane had landed in Israel. They returned to Fiji unharmed after a few days.

[114] Allusions to Fiji's connection to Israel were made in writing as far back as Fison (1881, pp.335-336) who likened its social structure to the register of Israelite families given in the 26th chapter of Numbers. Anthropologists Jones (2015) and Newland (2015) have explored the 'moral equivalences' drawn by Fijians to Israel within the 'Lost Tribes' theory, where its relative 'truth' in view of other origin stories (i.e. emergence from the Nakauvadra mountain range) is reconciled within a 'mythological ontology… primarily concerned with the moral and political implications of history' (Jones, 2015, p.271).

[115] Newland, 2015, pp.267-8.

[116] This theory is by no means widely accepted in rural Fiji, though many echo one interlocutor who said: 'I don't believe it, but I do believe Fiji is a blessed country'.

Luke: 'Israel is the reason we have this book [holding a Bible]. As long as Israel is on the map, this book will be - will be truth. That's why Israel will never, ever, they will never be able to eradicate them, because the day it happens this book is a lie.'

Courtesy and tact are integral parts of ethnographic research, but often discussions of Israel-Gaza became moments when my identity as researcher/Jewish in a staunchly pro-Israel area produced feelings of passivity that verged on the morally questionable. Was I to consume these feelings of interior disharmony to maintain an exterior of conformity and rapport? I came to feel that by responding as I did (vague acquiescence and demurring), I was complicit in supporting a one-sided view of the ongoing conflict.[117] The political response did little to assuage my concerns over moral, prophetic convictions' weight in the real world, as Pacific countries widely voted against a ceasefire in Gaza.[118] Indeed, in the latter stages of my fieldwork I began to state more of my core personal beliefs, in a 'neutral' way.[119] I did this, when discussing the conflict, by referring specifically to my personal memories of *kibbutzim*, a place which felt, strangely, much like a Fijian village, something interlocutors had already been telling me long before I had reflected it back. In trying to find an *equivalence* that I could morally stand by in times of conflict, my understanding of my own initial feelings of recognition in rural Fiji deepened, and I felt my sense of connection to interlocutors grow.

In closing, I will turn briefly to the epistemological framing of anthropological research and the ethical tensions that exist when doing research on land in Fiji, an existential topic. As the following chapters attest to, the written word is implicated in long histories of disempowerment, disenfranchisement, and alienation; not least of all regarding 'the land question' in Fiji. A post on Facebook in the middle of 2023 catches my attention, I had recently attended a beach clean in the city and been added to the group 'Save the Tiri'. The post details that the public consultation of a development lease given to a Chinese-owned corporation in the seafront Nasese neighborhood of Suva has been cancelled, for a second time. It incites a highly negative response from residents who point to the increase in local flooding since the nearby Nasese Waters project had reclaimed mangrove (*tiri*) areas. The response of one man, however, was not in relation to these environmental concerns, but to the title given to Tian Lun Investment: 'State Land without Title and State Tiri (Mangroves) Land'. His attached letter calls attention to the over one-hundred-year land rights claim by the people of Suvavou, a small village across the bay, to the Suva peninsular, the land in question.

[117] The rural/urban divide in this orientation is large, with many critics in NGO/academic spheres that problematised many Fijians' unflinching support of Israel. Fiji's vote against a humanitarian truce in October 2023 also exposed political divides in the coalition government which not only spoke to foreign policy differences, but also notions of Fijian ethnonationalism, faith, and eschatology (Wyeth, 2023).
[118] Fiji Government, 2023.
[119] DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p.47.

Sitting with Waisale Davuiqalita's, *mata-ni-vanua* of the *Vanua* Nadonumai, in his living room, archival papers strewn over the floor and every available surface, he made clear that the title for this land belonged to *his* lineage, who were not 'extinct' and whose rights were therefore not 'extinguished': '*We are still alive and well, but on the other side of the bay called Suvavou'.* The existential aspect to enduring legacies of displacement, and its entwinement with future risks, were apparent in his words:

> *Waisale: 'I always mention to the government – every tombstone nowadays we always write RIP - rest in peace – but our forefathers know; they are not resting in peace, until our land is returned back to us. Then, they rest in peace. Because they've been struggling, they've been coming and going, coming and go, from 1898, imagine, a letter was written in 1898, again in 1903, 1904, 1907, 1911, they're writing letters. The government knows that is their land, they're ignoring…*
>
> *You see our village is near the sea… when you see the effect of climate change in the village. It actually eats up the beaches in our place, in Suvavou.'*

In this way, climate change keeps the past *ever-present*, and anthropological knowledge becomes existential knowledge, which can work both ways; the disempowering 'black and white' of colonial-era inscriptions, and the ongoing, everyday research undertaken by *mataqali* across Fiji on lineage, genealogy, and land. As the introduction explained, this thesis' shift of focus from climate to land is reflective of emic concerns, and this suggests that the discourse of climate change must be approached as at various times emergent, hegemonic, and/or highly contested. Its extra-territoriality threatens to promote 'all-enveloping homogenisation' that risks, inadvertently, having 'at-risk' places localise climate change under an assumed ontology of vulnerability that delimits the 'ongoing conditions of possibility'.[120] Indeed, I found this tension vividly in early research interviews when discussing climate change. The responses: slight demurring, nods towards those deemed more apt respondents, answers that rose in tone to become questions; all felt to me in the moment, and more so in hindsight, as reflective of an uncomfortable inversion of the kind of tutelage relationship preferred and idealised by anthropology. In corresponding but inverted ways, Nabobo-Baba (2006) reflects that as an 'insider-outsider' researcher, she was - when asking questions about her own community - deemed either to be ignorant, or worse (and this is how this Western researcher interprets the evasions above): the knower *pretending* not to know.

In attempting to acknowledge the existential importance of land research in Fiji, then, an attendance to the textual performance of ethnographic authority is required; the way we cite, name, and describe.

[120] Baldacchino, 2006, p.9, Stein et al., 2015, p.292.

Challenging the epistemic division that normatively prescribes who is to be cited, whilst who is data, example, or anecdote, means entering the complex terrain of confidentiality and anonymity with regards to those who do not seek anonymity, but rather credit, which Waisale does. Throughout this thesis the tension between the politics of representation as a politics of acknowledgement, and Western anonymisation standards, thus, plays out dynamically and responsively (for example, names in Chapter 1 are largely unchanged, due to the specific connections between oral history and ancestry). This aspect of methodological reciprocity facilitates an ongoing commitment to participation in community through the logics of rightful ownership - of stories *and* land.

Chapter 1

Indeterminacies of the land

Fieldnotes, Narusa settlement, 16th October 2023

The hilly outcrop is visible from my emplacement in the village, overlooking the surrounding settlements that stretch out down towards the shoreline, it is here that a giant sleeps. In the past, teachers from the local Holy Cross school would tell their young kids to remain quiet as they passed the sau tabu (chiefly burial grounds). When Mere, a lady in her 60s, first arrived in Narusa in recent years, it took some getting used to: 'when I came here, I learnt a lot; girls wearing pants, everyone drinking grog, even the girls, smoking. Us, in the village, the sulu must be below the knee. And telling jokes with your cousins…', as she trails off she peers out of her open window towards Cibaciba, named after the adjacent waterfall where people go to cool off, the part of the settlement given by the Tui Tavuki to her relatives many years prior, after their ancestors housed the old Tui Tavuki's son in Suva whilst he was at school. We had been drinking grog here last night, and she explains that with Joseph, who is her husband Emosi's cousin, she can joke easily – as evidenced by his constant goading her into dancing throughout the night – but with Jale, her nephew (Emosi's cousin George's son), they maintain more timidity in their relationship, on account of veiwekani (kinship) rules.

Narusa is a 'mix', she says, its population made up of those from across Fiji whose ancestors came to put their kids in the nearby Holy Cross school. It is part of the village of Tavuki, which is just over a steep valley. Communication – such as needed during the sale of grog or the planning of the day's activities - can be done by yelling across this riverine indent if needed. Before the settlement, the thick forested area behind the church was a popular site for lovers to meet in secret, a fact often told to me in guarded tones. Nowadays, the settlement has a road that connects it with the shoreside Wairiki, it received access to electricity some years ago, and a corrugated tin shed (va'atunuloa) is located at its peak for its large social gatherings.

The family are originally from Vaturova across the Somosomo Strait in Vanua Levu; 'tai side' (the opposite shore), where the Tui Tavuki's mother descends also. When Mere and Emosi's house burned down on the mainland, the Tui Tavuki told them to build a house in Narusa. Here, she began to find out the familial connections within the village and settlement, a man who approached her knew they were cousins because of her name; she is the namesake (yaca) of her father's sister: 'I met a man, he asked me where I'm from, he asked my name, they know we are family… the girls, they take the blood everywhere'.

Her sense of belonging was strengthened by these familial connections. Then, her eyes shift from Cibaciba to the hill opposite, her face subtly softens, dimples appear, and her lips curl to form a slight smile. 'We know he will protect us,' she says, eyes fixed on the perch that juts very slightly outwards from the steep incline that ascends to Tavuki, 'we know our grandparents are up there'.

Her 'great-grandfather' was a man named Joji Yavita, a warlord from Tunuloa in Vanua Levu who fought the Tongan army which sought to conquer Fiji in the mid-19th century. He was buried with his knees bent, sitting upright, due to his enormous size. Mere returns her gaze to me, her eyes glistening: 'they won the war because of our grandparents'.

Fieldnotes, Suva, 4th February 2024

Sitting on Sera's veranda overlooking the bay in Suva, her son, middle-aged, is telling a story about how they first came to demarcate the plot of land in the bush in Vuna village (Vuna veikau), which they would come to call Rukuruku.

'We put the posts down. The posts even grew. That's how fertile the land is.'

A few seconds later when Sera returns, he repeats the story for her benefit, 'Isn't that right, Mum?'

Sera: 'That just goes to show we put them in the right place.'

Introducing indeterminacies

The wellbeing of the land, framed as fertility by Sera in the above quote, is a factor of socio-environmental reciprocity, wherein the land is positively responsive to those who plant *'in the right place'*. Fertility becomes one signifier of '*rightful ownership'*. This term, borrowed from an interlocutor, centralises relationality within ownership and, in doing so, produces indeterminacies in land ownership that overlap with cartographies consisting of borders, tenure systems, and constituent place-based histories of engagement. Land ownership is indeterminate in two ways, the first) that property law, like any law, is indeterminate because it is open to challenge, and the second) that the terminology, primarily 'ownership', is variously interpreted by different groups, as is evident across post-contact Fijian history.

In this chapter, I will explore how indeterminacies of land ownership are fostered by indigenous Fijians in southern Taveuni through the telling of local histories that compress wide temporal scales. These stories engage land ownership as one aspect of relationality, which intersect with histories of pre-

eminence, ancient polities, and indigenous conceptions of stewardship. As Hau'ofa (2008) has noted, the linguistics of the Fijian language highlight the way in which terms for the past explicitly refer to what is ahead, making the telling, retelling, and interpretation of *pasts* an ever-present concern:

> *'[it is] a conception of time that helps us retain our memories and to be aware of its presence… The past is alive in us, so in more than a metaphorical sense the dead are alive – we are our history'.*[121]

The logic of socio-environmental reciprocity manifests itself in exacting ways; the failure of land to support projects which are enacted by those individuals who do not have proper rights to it, the misfortune fallen on those individuals and, inversely, the fruitfulness of projects enacted on land with the backing of traditional owners. In one example given by an interlocutor of an EU-sponsored bridge-building project, nearby to Suva in 2003, construction had failed twice in putting down girders which had, at both times, cracked after various villages had given their approval. The third time, after approaching and receiving the permission of the village of Navuso, the girders held strong, and the project continued without a problem: 'We knew who the rightful owners were then' (Luisa). In other cases, those lands deemed improperly gained, are associated with cursed narratives of mysterious illness, and even death, so much so that one indigenous landowner who was aware of such histories 'won't touch the land' (Noa). In a case of sacred sites being maligned, such as the building of a nursery school close to the Nakauvadra mountain range, the effect can be dramatic; the babies cried incessantly each day until the block was moved slightly further from the base of the sacred mountains.

Socio-environmental reciprocity extends the logic of *rightness* to many facets of village life which includes not only environmental wellbeing, but also the socio-spiritual wellbeing of the community. In one such example, a black stingray which had stayed swimming in the shallow waters near to the shore was pointed to as evidence that the nearby chiefly installation ceremony was accepted by the land. In Vuna, during the last stages of the installation of a new chief, he is covered in smoked barkcloth of the paper mulberry tree (*masi kuvui*), and sits in a rock pool where freshwater aquifers are emitted into the ocean (*tuvu*) near to the village.[122] If a shark passes near to the shore at this time, it is said to be an acknowledgement of an old agreement the first paramount chief of Vuna made with sharks that there would be no hunting of sharks and, thus, they would not attack Vunans.[123]

Where reciprocities are not as clear to see at the time, they are found eventually through narrative extension into the present moment. This can be done by any member of a group whose framing of the

[121] Hau'ofa, 2008, p.460.
[122] This tradition of wearing *masi kuvui* is said to follow on from Vunan ancestors in Koro island.
[123] Heyes, 2020, p.6.

narrative indicates their contemporary socio-political position and motive. In one example, a long-ago agreed upon diversion of the chiefly lineage – with the stated intention of its reversion back once the former chief's heir had reached a suitable age – had become concretised and, thus, was wrongfully continued through to this day. Many such 'handshake arrangements' (*vakavanua*, lit. in the way of the land) are referenced in the present as part of familial claims to pre-eminence, land, and position in traditional structures. In this case, the ruling chiefly *mataqali* (landowning unit) had accrued much wealth through lease payments made to them, which they were wrongfully entitled to. The wealth, however, when made accessible to those young members of the landowning unit upon reaching the appropriate age, overwhelmed them and many became addicted to drugs and squandered their purportedly undue wealth. In effect, in a narrative of wrongdoing a negative reciprocity must eventually come to bear. Historicising contemporary misfortune is not merely political opportunism, rather it is symbolic of a reciprocity-based logic in which sickness, bad luck, even death, befall descendants as a product of modern political concretisation and land economy.[124]

In producing indeterminacies regarding the 'land question' in southern Taveuni, interlocutors drew on the twinned oral histories of Vuna and Tavuki village. Vuna formerly comprised of half the island (and whose chief, Tui Vuna, held power over much of the surrounding islands as far as the Lau group), and the people of Tavuki were its *bati balavu* (long-tooth warriors), which is now formally a part of Somosomo district, the chiefly village of Cakaudrove province, under the rule of Tui Cakau, the paramount chief of Cakaudrove (see Figure 3). These oral histories of the era of Vuna's pre-eminence exist in dissonance with a dominant discourse of the provincial paramountcy of the Ai Sokula chiefly lineage of Cakaudrove. Dissonance is intrinsic to heritage in which social memories constitute a history always-in-the-making. As the introduction suggested, seemingly contradictory notions of socio-political hierarchy are indicative of the ways *status* is conceptualised across wide temporal scales, bringing the past (Vuna's pre-eminence as an ancient polity) into recurrent dialogue with the present (the Tui Cakau's eminence on account of historical subjection of Vuna). The extent to which two notions, derived from different temporal scales, are held to be true will be explored in relation to the historical entwinement and disunion of Vuna and Tavuki. I argue that the indeterminacies produced through social histories of land alienation in south Taveuni offer visions of emplacement and belonging that often overlap, intersect, and contrast with understandings of histories of land ownership and alienation. To do this I will first detail my theoretical framework, before moving on to the wider historical literature on land alienation in south Taveuni. I will then explore a local, social history of the

[124] See also: Abramson, 2000, p.201-2.

period around the first of Taveuni's land sales, which will lead into a discussion of the various indeterminacies produced by these histories.

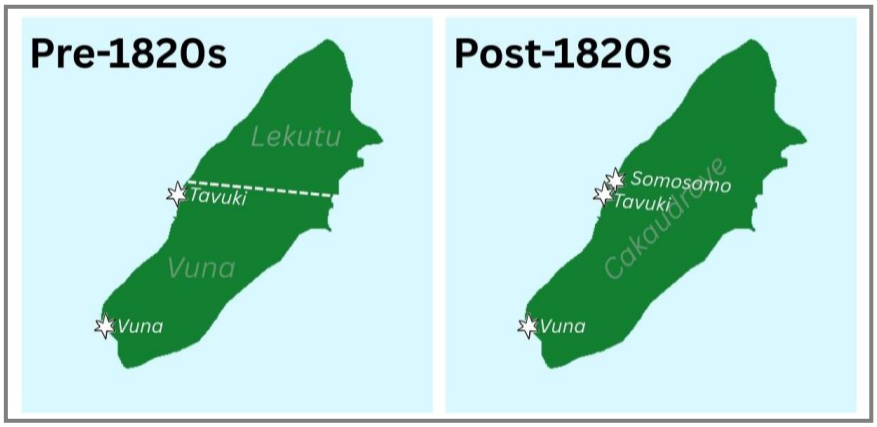

Figure 3. Simplified map of Taveuni showing historical changes in political alignments, dates are estimates.

In exploring social histories of land, I follow Alexander and Sanchez (2019) to show the ways in which farmers in south Taveuni employ *indeterminacy* as a socio-political resource. To begin I take a historical vantage point to the formation of the 'customary land tenure system', which is underpinned by questions of value and waste, and more foundationally, order and disorder. Indeterminacy is offered as a third option to these binaries, the 'silenced points of view' that are made illegible in systems of categorisation. Silence itself, as Nabobo-Baba (2006, pp.94-107) notes, has multiple cultural meanings in the *vanua* setting, and can signal 'total opposition… to complete support', its ambivalence frequently misunderstood by outsiders who claimed it as mere acquiescence. Identifying indeterminacies, thus, requires an appreciation for how classificatory systems marginalise other ways of being and knowing, which all the while endure in between the system's strictures:

> *'Indeterminacy therefore appears in the following modes: lack of recognition or incorporation in a given classification system; undetermined futures or directions; and a resistance to totalizing systems.'*[125]

As the Introduction explored, the historical literature on land tenure codification has traced this domain of representation through to its contemporary centrality within discourses of indigeneity and identity.[126] In this first chapter, I aim to lay the foundation of the central theme of this thesis that the past remains present through enduring relations to land and its entwinement with identity formation. In turn, I also aim to show the ways in which *misrecognition* has come to define, and indeed propagate, land issues within Fiji. Whilst the spirits in the above examples are *protective* of customary land

[125] Alexander and Sanchez, 2019, p.3.
[126] See also: France (1966), Knapman (1987), Legge (1958, especially pp.170-201), Macnaught (1982), Routledge (1985).

orthodoxy, it is primarily the ghostly quality of the 'what ifs' of customary land tenure which haunt this chapter.

I will now define my use of the term indeterminacy in this chapter and highlight the ways it is employed to make land claims and, inversely, to fundamentally challenge the metaphysical status of these claims. Indeterminacy in its negative aspect is viewed in terms of despair (euphemised in terms of unknowability and unpredictability), but it is also a requirement for hope. This positive aspect is the one I focus on in this chapter, to highlight the ways in which oral history and narratives of decline coalesce to produce indeterminacies of the land which are engaged through an ethic of *waiting*. As Oxley (2020, p.171) points out, hope's prospective engagement with the world is often sourced by looking back into cultural pasts: 'stories give shape to hope'. Hope is also, however, a deeply 'unpredictable and ungovernable' phenomena, as it is – amongst the Christian communities of Taveuni – derived from God, rather than any human agency, and thus rests on the basis that the future is never fully known.

I adopt the concept of indeterminacy to cover two main registers in this chapter, the first can be termed 'classificatory indeterminacy', which describes multiple contested claims to land. This is the kind of indeterminacy explored in ethnographic detail by Miyazaki (2004) about the Suvavou peoples' ongoing legal claims to Suva land, in which a 'method of hope' depends on persistent undertaking of archival research, writing of letters to government, and staking legal arguments to keep open what was ostensibly closed. Most of the claims by iTaukei are contested on the grounds of temporal boundaries, rather than spatial boundaries; a frequent complaint being the non-return of lands 'sold' under the title 'native grant' (to be explored in Chapter 2). It is important to note that the term 'indeterminacy' is applied here – as opposed to ambiguity, which also supposes contested claims existing at the same time – because of interlocutors' frequent exceeding of the categories of evidence accepted and valorised within jural spheres, primarily – as Sera's words on fertility and rightful ownership at the start of this chapter attest to - socio-environmental reciprocity.

The second register, which can be termed 'ontological indeterminacy', is a more fundamental descriptor of land's metaphysical status. Without drawing too wide a divide between the categories, however, I relate again how Sera's words at the start of this chapter balance classificatory indeterminacy (as claim to land) with an understanding of land as constituted by relations.[128] I employ the words of my interlocutors to emphasise the socio-environmental entanglements which exceed the very logics of separation that indeterminacy implies (as reliant on the notion of boundaries between categories, even if denied). These logics, introduced in effect by deeds of title and later colonial land

[128] Strathern, 1988, Leach, 2004.

law, have long attempted to settle land matters, and in this way have created the conditions for classificatory indeterminacy to persist. Ontological indeterminacy, conversely, draws on the co-constitutive relationship of land, identity, and social relations explored in the previous chapter, which problematised notions of 'property' as implying 'an entity with substantive, specific form'.[129] In the Melanesian literature explored, the interplay of fluidity and formalisation in land matters is a persistent concern.[130] In this way, the term 'indeterminacy' – with its emphasis on categorical oppositions - speaks to different conceptions of land (as history, kinship, property) and the relations these co-constitute. In this thesis, thus, both registers of indeterminacy intermingle in the commentaries of my interlocutors as dual modes – jural and interpersonal (including the non-human) - of apprehending relations.

I write of classificatory indeterminacy from the perspective of claimants, whose oral histories shape their 'rightful' claims to specific lands. On the other hand, I refer to ontological indeterminacy from a less stable perspective: as an ethic of incompleteness taken to its extreme and a resistance to dialectical resolution. The land, thus, resonates with the concept of the *pharmakon* as an ambivalence that persists, making any rightful claim to land only temporary. In interpretations of Plato's Pharmacy, commenters have, Derrida (1981) argues, mistranslated *pharmakon* (in his case: writing) into *either* cure or poison, and he suggests instead that Plato maintains its inherent ambiguity:

> *'It is not enough to say that writing is conceived out of this or that series of oppositions. Plato thinks of writing, and tries to comprehend it, to dominate it, on the basis of oppositions as such'*.[131]

In this sense, writing has both the potential for good and the potential for evil, in much the same way as speech, which is merely an extension of the logic of writing. In oral cultures, such as the one presented in this thesis, this Derridean argument can be understood as conceiving of speech as not 'before' writing but rather as a text *read* by an audience (and re-read through recollection and in the absence of the originating speaker/author). Instead of trying to capture oppositions (good and evil, inside and outside, true and false, essence and appearance) within one term, the ambiguity of the *pharmakon* must be retained, not turned to metaphor. Indeed, Derrida is concerned that translations which render the *pharmakon* within the language of 'the heirs and depositaries of Western metaphysics thus produce on the *pharmakon* an *effect of analysis* that violently destroys it'.[132] The ambivalences I discuss throughout this thesis are constituted through their oppositionality and

[129] Strathern and Hirsch, 2004, p.8.
[130] Sillitoe, 1999, Schneider, 2012.
[131] Derrida, 1981, p.103.
[132] Ibid., p.99.

resistance to dialectical resolution. In attempts not to destroy the *pharmakon* (or: *land*), thus, I employ the term indeterminacy to describe – and highlight the persistent exceeding of - the categories that exist *for* Fijians to make socio-political claims to land. In classificatory indeterminacy, land claims are not defined by binaries of essence/appearance, good/bad, true/false, but are – following Derrida's *pharmakon* - always *both*. Thus, throughout this chapter, people confront writing – of colonial era land records, lineages, and titles (what is termed the 'black and white') - as *both* poison and cure. In turn, this can easily be put in opposition to oral histories which frequently make diverging claims to knowledge. What I argue, however, is not to consider these two modes of apprehending relations as direct opposites, but rather more aptly framed – following Derrida's critique of the supposed binary between writing/speech – as both *pharmakon*. In this way, the 'black and white' and oral history are *both* remedy/poison, holding the dual potential to dispossess and/or empower.

Following Alexander and Sanchez (2019, p.16), indeterminacy provides a mode of apprehension and being which can 'complicate modernity's grand teleology'. In the context of south Taveuni, negative self-reflections on the extent of iTaukei development is a frequent subject of concern and comparison. People often point to their own modest houses and then over to Indo-Fijian settlements as proof that modernity (or more aptly, the spoils of modernity) seems to have evaded them. These 'failed promises' and 'forgotten futures' can invite blame, despair, grief, and forms of colonial nostalgia that align some interlocutors with a past that seemed full of potential.[134] Ruins and waste are often the referents for these negative reflections on the present; the dilapidated building of an old cinema a towering figure as one enters Wairiki, the remembrances of a lively 'old town' which existed in the estates of the south of the island, the simplicity of agricultural instruments and 'reversion to bush' of previously productive land; all these and more are suggestive to some of the remnants and unfulfilled promises of modernity. In this context, one is 'transfixed in a present, waiting either for the past or the future to return'.[135]

As this chapter will show, oral histories in south Taveuni are suggestive of a past-oriented futurism that concerns itself with both a return of the past *and* future. An ethic of waiting for this return, thus, contrasts with notions of finality and makes prospective – and thus hopeful – the possibility of returns of ancestral lands, ancient political eminence, and *the future*. Within these narratives, the 'totalising' orthodoxy of customary land tenure is at various times and for various purposes upheld, deployed, and subverted. In this way, I argue that my interlocutors concern themselves less with the specifics of *the past*, than on the enduring ability of *traditionalism* to act as a contrast for purposes of identity

[134] Alexander and Sanchez, 2019, p.16.
[135] Ibid., p.13, *italics* added.

formation. Therein, employing the structural oppositionality of 'the past' provides a method of indeterminacy to manage the ostensibly conclusive domain of the present.

During frequent trips to the National Archives Fiji (NAF), the sight of people from various villages across Fiji, huddled over handwritten documents and land commission reports, some over a hundred years old, was commonplace. Sitting outside one day during a lunchbreak, the warmth of the day contrasting with the chill of the air-conditioned archive reading room,[136] a man voiced his frustration at their clan's attempts to reconcile the past: 'It's Ratu Sukuna, it's his fault. He did many bad things, writing the wrong things'. It was made evident to me that the documents inside the NAF had power, both effected and latent, which anthropological texts shared. An interlocutor, after reviewing my written recounting of oral history in a follow-up trip, initially responded affirmingly, but followed this up with the statement: 'The real story is in the blood'. Histories of disempowerment through texts can, as this comment suggests, produce an epistemological suspicion based in ideas around sovereignty. Thus, in this chapter I aim to take an epistemological approach that foregrounds the intimate role of oral history in identity formation and its inverse; of identity's influence on history-making.

In trying to bridge this epistemological alignment within the confines of an anthropological text, oral history must also be understood as socio-political claim, prefaced by the fact that narratives do not need to necessarily correspond – indeed, they rarely do – with other groups' narratives held in other parts of the village or island. The sharing of certain narratives is a function of many factors, including individual, familial, and clan prerogatives, in which the stories that are believed are shared and thus given further credence.[137] The oral history of Cakaudrove, as historian Shelley Ann Sayes' (1984) has documented, is one in which competing claims to pre-eminence reflect the indeterminate, and constantly contested, power held by the pre-contact era chiefs of the region. She cautions:

> *'Because of the constantly changing balance of power, however, it is inevitable that many oral traditions have been manipulated to fit more current situations. Different groups may have retained their own versions of past events, but these are now difficult to obtain. Fijians well-versed in the traditions are no longer as numerous, while those who are well-versed may guard their knowledge. For such knowledge may bring more prestige if it is uncertain what and how much is actually known.'*[138]

[136] See Hanlon, 2003, p.30 for comment on the 'chill' that often accompanies the practice of 'history' in Oceania, distanced as it is from the telling of Oceanic pasts in everyday settings.
[137] I urge the reader to take heed of the often-repeated Fiji Times disclaimer: '*History being the subject it is, a group's version of events may not be the same as that held by another group. When publishing one account, it is not our intention to cause division or to disrespect other oral traditions. Those with a different version can contact us so we can publish your account of history too – Editor'.*
[138] Sayes, 1984, p.4. See: Lindstrom, 1991 on 'budgeted revelation' in Melanesia.

There are profound methodological issues in bridging not only epistemological misalignments in 'the land question', but also; in employing different forms of historical knowing. As Hanlon (2003) remarks, forms of history – oral, dance, poetic, and others – are always in tension within the strictures of academic history-making, which remains 'empirical in its approach and positivist in its epistemological assumptions'.[139] The work of influential Tongan academic Epeli Hau'ofa is essential here, which aimed at re-situating histories of Oceania as histories wherein the ocean – its namesake – played a central role as facilitator of deep histories of Oceanian ingenuity, rather than as mere impediments to imperial conquest.[140] Theorists working on 'wet ontologies' have taken water's physical characteristics as starting points to centre notions of fluidity and dynamism, contrasting them with land-based metaphors of solidity and stasis.[141] As Sayes (1982, 1984) has detailed above, the processual nature of oral narratives in Cakaudrove are part of an ethic of incompleteness that is both intentional (through withholding) and unintentional (through forgetting). The dynamic pre-colonial political formations that Sayes details, emerging – dissolving – emerging (in often very *non*-pacifist ways), and the evidence of extensive exchange between Tonga and Fiji in the many years before European history-making (through oceanic voyaging), exhibit dynamism in its content, and oral narratives exhibit it in form. To explore how land orthodoxy continues to frame and orient contemporary concerns of Fijians within its categories, I will first briefly refer to the historical literature which traces its earliest codified forms.

Mis/recognition: determining land ownership in the early colonial state

Determining the definition, extent, and boundaries of land ownership would become a central preoccupation of the Land Claims Commission (LCC), with the very first hearing of the LCC taking place in Taveuni in December 1875, suggestive of its 'messy' land alienations.[142] The LCC ran until February 1882, after which the Native Lands Commission (NLC) continued registering indigenous land. In contrast to a vision of colonial *subjects* being wholly amenable to ritualised colonising practices, historian Robert Nicole (2010) has intricately shown that indigenous Fijians engaged in many tactics to reproduce indeterminacy in all land matters. These methods included directly targeting the instruments of surveyors, therein 'Fijians struck at the physical instruments by which their conceptual sense of "place" was being attacked.' [143] Methods used to deal with attempts at land 'registration' ranged from the intentional confusing of surveyors, 'tactical' engagement with land commissioners, to outright silence and boycott; a facet of what Lindstrom (1991) has called in the Melanesian context

[139] Hanlon, 2003, p.23.
[140] Hau'ofa, 1994, 1998, 2008.
[141] Steinberg and Peters, 2015.
[142] Lin, 2012, p.45.
[143] Nicole, 2010, p.147. See also: France, 1966, p.254.

'budgeted revelation'.[144] In budgeting the extent of the knowledge they shared, Fijians were able to retain the fundamentally indeterminate character of land ownership. Indeed, the impact of these acts - restricting the extent to which land commissioners were able to delineate land borders and ownership rights (starting with the Land Claims Commission) - meant that Governor Sir Everard im Thurn's later amendment (1905-1907) to Arthur Gordon's protectionist land laws - allowing the sale of native land and conversion of 'surplus lands' into Crown Lands – had minimal effect, as most lands were yet to be surveyed or registered.[145] Reproducing indeterminacy through budgeting revelation with equal parts concealment, thus, had political efficacy.

Notions of finality and indeterminacy permeate the discourses around land commissions. As the Director of the Lands Commission, David Wilkinson, wrote in the early-20th century: 'A Fijian has an innate objection to finality in land questions'.[146] France (1966) has taken up this bold conclusion, challenging its supposition that Fijians did not understand either alienability nor permanence; and highlighting Wilkinson's positionality as part of the orthodox Native Lands Commission (NLC). Instead, as France traces, land tenure was far more diverse and dynamic across Fiji; and when a sense of *finality* came to bear in Provincial Councils and meetings of Land Commissions, it was more concern with the fundamental contradiction of *determinacy*; as exemplified by written records, survey maps, and land registration ('*black and white'*) – rather than the particularities of the 'customary' land system being *prescribed* across the nation – which Fijians were rebelling against. It was the 'irrevocable air' of written records and public pronouncements that challenged the custom of sufficient indeterminism which allowed matters to be reopened later, should it be necessary to do so.[147] This is not the same, France argues, as not being acquainted with notions of alienation and permanence; but rather, adding a fine point to Wilkinson's above: 'the *most influential Fijians were* opposed to finality in matters of land ownership'.[148] This subtle distinction suggests the important connection between knowledge of boundaries, rights, history, *and* power; with the *necessarily* indeterminate nature of land questions being an integral way that socio-political process remained customary and, thus, acceptable.

Indeed, a preoccupation with the *future*, rather than the notion of a discoverable, generalisable 'past', was far more prevalent amongst the indigenous actors in the NLC. This fundamental misalignment drove many of the commission's misrecognitions forward, as the *past*; understood as a socio-political resource across chiefly, colonial, Bauan, settler groups; and its relation to historicity; comes to define the representational strictures of indigenous social structure and land tenure system. The *past* of

[144] See also Abramson, 2000, p.193-4.
[145] Nicole, 2010, pp.146-148, p.223.
[146] David Wilkinson quoted in: Macnaught, 1982, pp.117-8. See also: France, 1966, p.258-264.
[147] France, 1966, p.263.
[148] Ibid., p.245, *italics* added.

Lorimer Fison, the influential missionary has largely stood the test of time, which understands 'customary land tenure system' in the following terms: that chief and commoner are held to be equal in land matters ('The chief is their lord, but he is not their landlord'), native land is inalienable, the landowning unit is the clan (*mataqali*), land is passed down through generations, rights and boundaries are known of all lands in Fiji, and underlying all of this is an immemorial spiritual connection to place.[149] Where the numerous Land Commissions between 1875 and 1920 found greater diversity in landholding patterns, structures, and agreements that did not align easily at all with the strictures of the NLC, the gap between the 'orthodoxy' and 'practice' was quietly obfuscated.[150]

France (1966, p.118) offers this analysis of early land sales which challenges the NLC's orthodox view of *custom*, land alienation, and chiefly rights:

> *'From a Fijian point of view it would probably be nearer the truth to reverse the commonly-held view and to say that they thought they were parting with the ownership and retaining the usufruct. The nearest concept to ownership in Fijian is the 'lewa' of the land, which means the right to control its use. This was the right possessed by the chiefs and it was the lewa of the land which they transferred to Europeans. From the time of the transfer any occupants of the land who were allowed to remain presented their first fruits to the European settler instead of the Fijian chief, in recognition of the fact that they held their lands from a new overlord. This does not, of course, indicate that they transferred any other allegiances. They remained subject to their chiefs but paid a form of rent to a European landlord.'*

France's analysis challenges a number of aspects that define 'custom' in the colonially codified land tenure system of the NLC, key amongst them for this discussion; that land, rather than being held communally amongst clans (*mataqali*), was often held individually, within families, or in other land-owning units not defined by the NLC. The chief indeed was in a feudal sense a 'landlord' who often alienated lands in exchange for *yau* (treasured goods) or customary services rendered. This is a direct inversion of Fison's (1881, p.344) conclusion that conquest of land leads to the 'surrender of the fruits of the soil, but not of the soil itself'. He records the words of a chief who had sold the land of a conquered tribe, from which he expected an act of retaliation: 'but the white men have many guns. They are a war-fence to my back.' In another aspect, persistent (and permanent) movement, displacement, and/or migration conflicts with the notion of 'immemorial', spiritually imbued connection with *particular* lands, as opposed to a more dynamic picture as detailed by tribal migrations traced in villages' *Tukutuku Raraba*. Indeed, that the definitions of the NLC's 'custom' were often

[149] Fison, 1881, p.345. See: France, 1966, pp.231-2, p.239 for criticism.
[150] See France, 1966 for detailed analysis.

incongruous with the practices recorded of early land sales; wherein chiefs were the only vendor ever sought by Europeans, extending their right to alienate to another race; highlights that frequently (following Mosse, 2005) the 'domain of practice' differed greatly from the 'domain of representation'.

Where this 'finality of decision' came to bear in Taveuni, the effect was a mosaic of land tenure systems that continues to this day. In Vuna, a 'squeezed land', as many interlocutors referred to it, the large estates which surround the village are physical inscriptions of the past. Salialevu and Ura estates in the south offer leasehold plots of land to farmers from the nearby villages and settlements, with a three-to-four-year lease being payable by quasi-sharecropping arrangements. In the colonial era, European-owned estates were often sites of discontent, wherein the hierarchies of the early colonial state were made clear. Nicole (2010) suggests the rebellious force of the anti-colonial movements in Ra and Colo districts in Viti Levu may have been seeded on these estates during enforced labour periods that took villagers far away from their homes. It was on these estates that Fijians encountered early European settlers that more than likely incited in them feelings of resentment towards their lowly status in the pre-colonial and early colonial state, as evidenced by the everyday forms of resistance they enacted.[151]

In southern Taveuni, European planters sought in the LCC a 'speedy settlement of the land question'. Settlers lamented that several hundred acres of ripe sugar cane had been burnt due to the lack of a sugar mill on the island, which no plantation owner was prepared to invest in 'when he was not sure whether he owned the land or not'.[152] Indeed, the early planters were much preoccupied with determining, and formalising, land rights to ensure the security of their investments. J.V. Tarte, who had acquired plentiful land from departing settlers; including Vatu Wiri, Wai Na Aka, Holmhurst, Vickerys, totalling many thousands of acres of formerly Vuna land, had met with anticipation the cession of Fiji and arrival of the LCC:

> *'To my great joy, annexation came off and a Commission of four was sent out from England to enquire into our titles for the land we held. Before this, we had only a memo in the books of the British Consul and the agreements with the Chiefs. My titles were all right but many*

[151] Some colonial officials also claimed that indigenous Fijians were inspired in their organisation by new knowledge of 'secret societies', i.e. freemasonry of the West (see Worsley, 1968, p.24 on its use of cryptic phraseology, for example). Nicole (2010) remarks that Mosese Dukumoi, from Drauniivi in Ra province, who would later become Navosavakadua, the famous 'oracle priest' of the anti-colonial, anti-Bauan *Tuka* movement, worked on Salialevu plantation in southern Taveuni around 1873, during an enforced labour period. See: Nicole, 2010, Kaplan, 1995, the original mention of this Taveuni connection where Dukumoi was 'deeply disturbed by contact with western culture' comes from Thompson, 1940, p.117-118.

[152] Dwyer, 1988. Note: it was eight years later that the Holmhurst Mill was built (1883-1897), and owned by W.W. Billyard and Co., a Sydney solicitor. Upon closure in 1897, the land was acquired by J.V. Tarte and the machinery sold off to the Colonial Sugar Refining (CSR) company.

thousands of acres were confiscated where payment was made in guns, powder, and bullets… The excitement was intense as it all lay with the Commission whether we got our lands or not and I won't forget that time in a hurry.

[…]

A Colonel Price came out from England to survey our land and he calmly told me I had no land in Taveuni but my land was out in the Koro Sea… he had gone magnetic north and not due north.'[153]

Tellingly, when Ratu Sukuna undertook the native lands commissions in the 1920s, he took the 'unusual step' of reopening the inquiry into the lands at Vuna, for the reason that the chief had not mentioned to the earlier Commission that a 'subordinate *mataqali*' had been given compensatory planting rights on his chiefly clan's land, on account of his selling off a portion of their land pre-cession. Sukuna noted that the Vuna people would not press their claims in the presence of their chief, thus he added 'encumbrances' on the title, as a form of equity for the subordinate clan.[154] Indeed, even when legal settlements were achieved, this did not conclude matters, but rather created a duality to be negotiated into the future, as Macnaught (1982, p.118) notes:

'When the final classifications and boundaries were promulgated, it was then up to the community itself as to how far or in what respects the official version of their society displaced the pre-existing social organization. To the confusion of some anthropologists and later generations of the people themselves, the one interacted with the other. Decisions on the use of land may have continued at one level to be made in the old way, but then if a dispute came to litigation, the official records were there to achieve a finality of decision not previously available.'

This section has shown the ways in which the instruments of colonial land codification failed to capture the fluid dynamics of land rights in Fiji. In turn, contemporary society contends with enduring land disputes not merely as a cause of specific instances of dispossession, unequal exchange, or chiefly whim, but also a more foundational disconnect between officialdom's *curse* of finality and customary indeterminism. The dualistic interplay between these two modes of apprehension will underlie the remaining sections of this chapter, in which indeterminacies are re-produced through oral history, which persistently challenge the notion of finality in matters of land and polity. In this way, I aim to reflect my interlocutors by parochialising the historical records to show how official misrecognition (of

[153] Tarte, n.d., p.27-28.
[154] Macnaught, 1982, p.119.

land rights) and lack of recognition (of the fundamental indeterminacy of these rights) is contested in the telling and re-telling of pasts, re-making the future as undetermined.

Reproducing indeterminacy through oral history

To return to Mere's words about her 'grandfather' buried in the hill above Tavuki, her sense of belonging and security derived from the familial connection forged long ago in warfare. The questions which continue to be asked of 'rightful ownership' in southern Taveuni stem from a time of tribal warfare and early European settlement. These oral narratives act as rhetorical devices to *re-produce* indeterminacies of the land and derive their mode of questioning from understandings of pre-colonial pre-eminence as a constantly shifting arrangement of political power. I will further explore this point later with further context on the state of Cakaudrove politics at the time of the Battle of Wairiki in 1862. In following the production of indeterminacy, it is the centrality of the figure of a giant warlord that I will focus on now; the grandfather figure who continues to look over the settlements of Narusa and Wairiki. The story of Joji Yavita and the lands of Taveuni are intricately entwined.

> The Battle of Wairiki, Saturday 16th August 1862, a history summarised from many interlocutors.[155]
>
> Wainiqolo, who was a native Fijian from Lakeba, acted as the Tongan warlord Ma'afu's commander, and brought his fleet through the Lau group of islands, conquering each as they passed, and accruing a greater number of warriors in doing so. Eventually, his fleet arrived in Taveuni. The Vuna people had lit a fire in the southern end of the island, so the Tongans saw there were people living here. For this reason, the Tongan army continued to sail around the western coast of the island in their schooner and war canoes, seeing fires lit up the coast of Taveuni until the middle of the island – near to Nayalayala, the border between the polities of Vuna and Lekutu. In this part of the island, in the village of Tavuki, was sheltered the Tui Cakau, the paramount chief of Cakaudrove province. The village, at a high elevation around one kilometre from the shore of the Somosomo strait, had a panoramic view of invaders. There were no fires lit here, so the Tongan army viewed this as the best place to land. At the foot of

[155] History constructed with reference to fieldnotes and interviews with interlocutors in Wailevu in Tunuloa, and in Taveuni: Narusa, Tavuki, Delaivuna, and Vuna.

Tavuki's hills was the settlement of Wairiki, where the last great battle of the Tongan invasion would take place.

Within the landscape the local villagers had dug canals that stretched up the hill to Tavuki village. They had arranged large black rocks in formation to contain dammed water that had been diverted from streams via bamboo pipes. The canals were blocked off with gates that could be opened to release large swathes of water towards incoming invaders as they attempted to clamber up the steep incline, driving them back down the hill.

Tui Cakau had sought help before the Tongans arrived, having sent word to his warriors in Vanua Levu, across the strait, that they were to come to Taveuni to fight for their province. One of those who heard the call was the great warlord Joji Yavita, who lived in the village of Wailevu of Tunuloa district, in which the Tui Cakau had maternal links. Yavita assembled his Tunuloan army at Nawi point in the south-eastern tip of Vanua Levu, where the battle ships waited to cross the strait, in what would become known as Navakerekere (*being low down and watching*). It was nearby that a Catholic priest, Fr. Laurent Favre, was spotted by Ratu Golea. The two men met and the priest gave Golea a cross, with a promise; *with this cross you shall win the war*. Golea responded that if this eventuated, Cakaudrove would convert to Catholicism.

Yavita, thus, brought all his Tunuloan warriors, famous for their great size, across to Taveuni.

> *Joji: 'All the people around this area, they don't want to join Tui Cakau, because they heard the Tongans were mighty warriors, they were conquering all the places where they were going so no one wanted to join him to fight the Tongans, except Yavita and his warriors.'*

Many Fijians had their bodies painted fair, after having their islands conquered and joining forces with the Tongans. During the battle, as Tongans approached from the shore up the steep incline, Yavita would sit in the middle of the village, where a statue of the Virgin Mary now stands. After the release of water, the oncoming Tongans who had managed to climb on top of the canals, thus evading the heavy streams, would be met by him. He liked to throw objects: animals, breadfruit, whatever he could get his hands on. He demanded that no other fighters get close to him whilst he was in battle, for they would likely get hurt.

The warriors defending Taveuni used bamboo straws as snorkels to swim around the incoming Tongan raiders and attack them from behind as they made their approach to the beaches of Wairiki. The Tongans 'scattered' upon meeting the well-prepared army of Golea, some hiding

in the bush before being killed, many swimming out to sea to evade capture, with some reaching the nearby small island of Korolevu. It is said that the name given to the central administrative portion of the island – Waiyevo – derived from Taveuni's fighters pointing out these escaping enemies: '*wai e vo'* (they are in the water).

The battle was won and the Tongans, who had conquered much of Fiji, were finally defeated. In the battle, Ma'afu's top commander and strongest warrior, Wainiqolo, was killed by Golea's brother Ratu Daunivavana, and the villagers in Tavuki cooked his heart which the Tui Tavuki ate.

Golea received a wound during the battle, and upon further investigation the blade that had cut into his shoulder – which would stay with him for the rest of his life - was from Taveuni, a clear sign that the islanders were not all loyal to this stranger chief. One man from Narusa pointed to a woman sitting opposite us as we drank grog one day, she being from a northern village: '*It was her people'*.

One of the slain Fijian fighters on the Tongan side was a member of the Bauan chief Ratu Cakobau's family whose body was found after the war. As a cause of this, Yavita had to travel to Bau to do a *matanigasau* (traditional apology) to Cakobau, but – being the wily warlord he was – he held the *tabua* in one hand, and his trusted warclub in the other, which all in attendance were silently aware of.

After the war, the cross that was given by Fr. Laurent Favre to Golea – as a 'promise' - was then given to the Tui Tunuloa, Ratu Vakalamena (Yavita's elder brother), to be housed at Koroivonu (the place Joji Yavita rested when he was not in battle), where it stayed in St Anne Church. Yavita was made a chief by Tui Cakau and given a piece of land via the traditional ritual of *qusinoloaloa* (lit. *'wiping away the darkness'*, an act of gratitude) in both Tunuloa (Koroivonu) and in Taveuni, near to Wairiki. Tui Cakau also offered his sister, Adi Filomena Lolo, as a wife as thanks for bringing back one of his own wives from the clutches of Yavita's brother. He lived out his latter days in Taveuni, having multiple wives and many offspring. He was eventually buried in the *sau tabu* of Tavuki village.

The cross, gifted to Tunuloa, stayed in the village of Koroivonu until just a few years ago when it was returned. In this large ceremony, the Tui Tunuloa brought the cross, wrapped in barkcloth (*masi)*, back to the Holy Cross church in Wairiki, in a highly emotional day. It was said that when the Tunuloans came, the sea was very rough and it had not rained for many weeks,

the rivers ran dry, and the crops were suffering. When the cross returned, the rain soon followed.

The historical relevance of the Battle of Wairiki in the trajectory of Taveuni's lands will soon be expanded on, but first I want to return to the hilly outcrop that overlooks the settlements of Wairiki in the *sau tabu* of Tavuki village, the resting place of Joji Yavita. It was here that Mere's eyes were diverted when she said: 'We know he will protect us… we know our grandparents are up there'. Yavita, today, is often described as '*caga walu'* (lit. stretched span of hand from tip of thumb to tip of little finger, eight times) meaning that from his ankle to his knee was the length of eight stretched hand-spans. Indeed, interlocutors often spoke of his great size:

Soni: 'When he stood up, all his siblings go under him, through his legs.'

Inoke: 'The power of three is in one.'

Stories of giants of Fiji's past are plentiful, and often underlying their telling is an implicit critique of modern lifeways and declining Fijian physical stature.[156] Yavita's enormity and 'hunger for war' were infamous, such that some of his descendants - of whom there are many across Cakaudrove, Bua, Macuata, and Lau - have taken the name Vatukatakata, meaning: '*in war, when he rests on a stone, he makes it hot'*.[157] Yavita's allegiance to Tui Cakau was said to be so fervent that when the Tui Cakau requested that the Tui Tunuloa be killed in revenge of his stealing the Tui Cakau's wife, Yavita – a native of Tunuloa - travelled to Tunuloa and identified the house of the Tui Tunuloa, at which time he instructed his battle companion to kill the chief.

Yavita is recounted as immensely loyal but also wily, as his holding close his warclub during the *matanigasau* ceremony exemplified. Indeed, recounting the oral history of Cikobia, Kitione Vuataki writes of a variation in the story; Yavita presenting the *tabua* not to Ratu Cakobau, but to the Tui Cakau himself; his knowledgeable sense of the times making him always weary, even of his paramount chief's intentions:

[156] The village of Navakawau in Vuna district also tell the story of a giant, Lalavata, of the Nacou clan, who were present in the village before the Waimakilu clan of Vuna moved in, he was described as: 'a one man army, taller than anyone living nowadays'. Giant ancestors are referred to in Rokowaqa's (2013, p.6) account of pre-colonial history, as the offspring of the ancestral god Ratumaibula, they resided in a place called Vuniivilevu, a now disappeared land between Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

[157] The Vunivalu of Bau and the Roko Tui Dreketi were referred to as 'the two hot stones' (*o rau na Vatu Katakata*), meaning they could order anyone whom they wished to be cooked, suggesting Yavita was of particularly high status (Routledge, 1985, p.48).

'[H]e was a star amongst his own people. Had not the Tui Cakau sent assassins to kill Korovakaturaga of Macuata because the Babasiga sun was getting brighter than his? As Yavita prepared for battle, he was troubled not by the Tongans, but by those at his back'. [158]

Indeed, Vuataki's allusion to Yavita's fears of '*those at his back*' is suggestive of the era's highly contentious and dynamic political allegiances. Following his victory in the battle of Wairiki, this same vigilance, his advanced age, and decades of service throughout periods of intense tribal warfare, however, had taken their toll.[159] He lived out the remainder of his days in Tavuki, and sired many children.

I meet Joji, Yavita's namesake and descendent, living in a settlement off Salialevu Road, near to Vuna. He is a manager at Salialevu estate and, as he tells me, a frequent poster on Facebook on political issues. He makes clear the distinction between Yavita and 'those at his back', referring to the construction of *provinces* in Fiji and European support for amenable chiefs to '*control the area'*. Indeed, he paints the behaviour of these ascendant chiefs who used '*vere ka Bau'* (tactical style warfare), which by its name is associated with Bauan supremacy, as 'cunning', those who employ its methods are *lawaki cā* (deceitful or ambushing, bad). On the other hand, Yavita is framed as valorous and loyal. Joji recounted, as in the above brief history, that few from the surrounding islands wanted to fight the Tongan army - 'except Yavita and his warriors'. This, he added, explained much about the socio-political dynamics of Taveuni (and the wider Cakaudrove and Lau provinces) today.

Joji: 'Those of us from Tunuloa, the Tui Cakau will call us 'noqu qasi', it means 'my elder… the people from Tunuloa came from a woman who is older than Tui Cakau, that's why they call us 'qase', we are from Tui Cakau's older sister; there's a relationship between Yavita and Tui Cakau. So, he was asking the whole place, from Laucala to Qamea, all these places, Vuna, Lau, to join him in the battle: they all refused. And when he won, when he won the battle, he sold all their land. He sold it, all the land. You see, every island that has been sold, freehold now; it was sold by the Tui Cakau 'cos they refused to join him in battle…

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[158] Some aspects of Yavita's role in the battle of Wairiki are told differently in Vuataki's (2013) text, based on the oral history of Cikobia island, with which Yavita had familial links. The author's ancestor is the warrior Pua'abale, who fought with Yavita during the battle of Wairiki. In telling the above version of events it is not my intention to discredit nor disrespect other versions. Two main key differences in Vuataki's account are: a) Fr. Favre gave the cross and promise of victory to Yavita when they met in Tunuloa, who then made the case to the Tui Cakau once Yavita and Favre both travelled to Taveuni, and b) after the battle, the Tui Cakau had planned to kill Yavita, on account of his killing one of his half-brothers (for which Yavita undertook the *matanigasau* ceremony). Tui Cakau changed his mind because his favourite wife, Adi Caginitoba, was from Tunuloa, and she implored him that if he should do so, he also would allow her to die with her people, which he did not want.

[159] Vuataki, 2013.

Like Vuna, they just have a little portion of land… Tui Cakau now he's like self-promoted to be chief of Cakaudrove… like today they don't recognise the Tui Cakau, till today, they don't recognise him, 'cos they know he's from Vanua Levu.

[J.S.: Is this official?]

No, not really, but - because they know, 'cos he's not from here, 'cos Taveuni is divided into two, only two chiefs… before it was just a small area of Vuna got its own chief, up there they got their own chief, and they have their own chiefs [signalling over the strait] there's no provincial chief, those were brought in by the Europeans, so that they can lead the people easily, so that they can control; that's how – so when they support that chief to be powerful, they can control the area – for them, that was how they did it. It was hard for these people to recognise, but they do today – today they recognise him, today, but in reality they don't eh. Tui Vuna is Chief in Vuna.'

A narrative accounting of the Taveuni's history frequently starts here; when the Tongans invaded Fiji and the Battle of Wairiki put a decisive stop to their campaign. It was in this time, as many interlocutors highlighted symbolically, that the Church (in the form of the cross) and early settlers (with the musket and map) settled on the island: bringing ideologies of faith and ownership. Thus, it is important to note the way in which the battle has been euphemised as one both defined by, and defining, the faith of Catholics in Taveuni. The battle has long been symbolically framed, within the community and by outsiders, as to do with sacred efficacy (a war of *faith*) that binds the people of Taveuni. However, these accounts camouflage the historical context of complex, dynamic inter-tribal allegiances and land politics that made it a turning point in the relations of the Tui Cakau to his dominion lands. In turn, the battle comes to reflect the inherently indeterminate character of faith (and of *waiting*); becoming a historical touchpoint for the turning of the tide in Taveuni towards Christianity, a turning that remains ceaselessly prospective, and entwined with narratives of land alienation to follow.

Where the Battle has come to be synonymous with the region's Catholic identity, it is also widely accepted the 'promise' of the cross, for the chief and region to convert to Catholicism, was not kept; until recently.[160] The cross was returned in 2005 to Holy Cross Parish after spending 143 years in Koroivonu in Tunuloa. Mere, whose mother is from Koroivonu, remembers:

[160] The reason that Tui Cakau Ratu Golea could not accept Catholicism is in part that he had up to 50 or 60 wives (Britton, 1870, p.64).

'When they tried to come, the sea was very rough, the river was dry – ran out of water – after a few weeks the rain comes. That thing is very meaningful to us. Most of us cried when they gave it back… the Tui Tunuloa needed it, the Priest here needs it'.

The plaque which adorns the wall next to the cross, housed at Holy Cross church today, reads:

'This crucifix inspired the Tui Cakau to defeat the Tongans under Ma'afu led by his warrior Wainiqolo.'

The choice of the word '*inspired*', I argue, bridges the dichotomous understandings of the war as, on the one hand, a war fought by splintered allied groups which reflected Taveuni's internal power struggles (the Tui Cakau not having the full support of Vuna, for example), and as an unifying story for the region that is pronounced in Fiji as being a 'mix', on account of its heritage as the landing site for many disparate islanders who found their lands sold in the years following the battle. Of the two main written historical sources from which information can be gleaned of the Battle of Wairiki, it is the more recent of the two which mentions this priestly promise. In Deniau's more temporally proximate account (being present in Taveuni between 1876-86) Ratu Golea promises Father Favre of conversion if they are victorious, but no cross is handed over; the priest leaves 'his heart full of hope'.[161]

The 'war of faith' narrative similarly obfuscates key evidence, tellingly even the missionaries present at the time remarked Christianity was likely a secondary matter to factions invested in tribal politics.[162] Joeli Bulu, a Tongan Wesleyan minister present at the time of the Battle of Wairiki states that a countryman of his heard the cousin of Golea, Ratu Kuila, who rivalled him in succession to the title of Tui Cakau, talking to the warrior Wainiqolo and surmised that he 'joined himself to us, not because he loved the lotu [church], but because he wanted to kill Ngolea, who stood in his way'.[163] Framing the war as a 'war of faith' was, thus, in large part a European, Wesleyan pre-occupation, made clear by the fact that following the conclusion of the war, with Golea and Cakaudrove freshly 'converted' to Catholicism, European officials and missionaries present in the area were said to view the terms of the dispute in much the same way: the Tongans remained the 'saviours of Wesleyanism… [i]nstead of working the iniquity of heathenism, Golea was now representing Catholicism, which was equally objectionable'.[164] This view of the Tongans as 'saviours' was, tempered, even by their staunchest European allies, as it was clear not all were there for 'faithful' reasons. The frequently employed Tongan tactic of involving themselves in internal disputes, aligning with the Wesleyan-proclaiming side,

[161] Deniau, n.d. p.100. See also: Crispin, 2005.
[162] Spurway, 2015, p.205.
[163] Bulu, 1881, p.91.
[164] Sayes, 1982, p.293.

was both strategic and opportunistic.[165] Shrouding *opportunism* under the guise of *Christianity* endeared Ma'afu to missionaries as he swept through the Lau islands, turning them against the Tui Cakau. As Joji noted to me: 'The area was very hostile back then, so in order for the gospel to penetrate, they came with the gun too'. But this alignment of Tonga, Wesleyanism, and conquered Fijian warriors also had its limits: during the battle of Wairiki the Tongan forces numbering 1,500 were defeated by Golea's forces of a mere 250. As oral tradition describes it, plenty of the men in Wainiqolo's army were recently vanquished Fijians from the Lau group who had little will to fight their paramount chief and his people.[166] In another possible reading, one that many suggest in relaying the strength of the Tongan invasion of Fiji and Cakaudrove's *last stand* in the Battle of Wairiki, is that the 'promise' of the cross aided David versus Goliath.[167]

The historicity of the 'war of faith' narrative, thus, whilst largely understood to be spurious, is a powerful socio-spiritual resource, binding those in the vicinity of the Holy Cross, a *mixed* area: 'in Narusa all different people there'. If 'rightful owners' are submerged – though remain known – then a 'war of faith' narrative, buttressed by the return of the cross that '*finished* the promise', becomes a metaphorical elision of disputes over power, land, and people into a matter of faith. The glory, in effect, is given to God, whilst the inherent unknowability of the past – what one fought *over,* or *for* - becomes yet one more tool to produce indeterminacies in the land. The effect of these indeterminacies, my interlocutors were keen to stress, is the foregrounding of the notion of unification over segmentation: in Biblical terms, we all were *strangers* to this land once. As a local priest told me when I first met him in the balcony overlooking the grounds of the Holy Cross church:

> *Fr. Isoa: 'We don't know who owns the land, but we act like we are from here… But really we know who owns the land, one small village in the north – Vidawa – and one in the south – Vuna. But when you come here, people make you feel like you have known them for a long time. It's not like that where I come from, in the highlands… they want to know who are you, where you come from, all of that…'*

In exploring these historical narratives of land and faith, local discourses remain submerged under wider, provincial, and national identity discourses. The persistence of these local discourses manifests as indeterminacies that put the eventuality of *returns* into a prospective future. Claims to this future can be made by any individual or group who regard their rights to have been maligned in the past, as

[165] This is the case here, where a member of the Ai Sokula - Ratu Kuila - made the request for Wainiqolo's support in a leadership dispute within the *yavusa* as to the succession of the current Tui Cakau Raivalita (see Bulu, 1881, Sayes, 1982, p.287).
[166] Sayes, 1982, pp.291-3.
[167] In another Biblical allusion, Yavita was likened to David in relation to King Saul, suggesting that *jealousy* was one of the reasons for a perceived burying of his legacy.

the plethora of land disputes and chiefly lineage investigations of the present day Taukei Land Trust Board (TLTB) attest to. In a recent visit by the TLTB, the villagers at Wailevu were asked if anyone was a descendant of Yavita, and half of those present put their hand up, though his name appears nowhere in the written records. Reflecting on this misrecognition, an elder told of an environmental quirk that whilst rivers were flowing, tellingly the village was experiencing drought: 'even the water knew something was wrong'.

Joji's words about the Tui Cakau above reflect two notions – one which speaks of finality, the other indeterminacy – can coexist in the iTaukei mindset; 'today they recognise him, today, but in reality they don't eh'. The emphasis on the present – *today* - suggests the unresolved nature of the past and future, which Hocart (1952, p.61) found as Vunans spoke 'in the same breath' of both not being subject (*qali*) to Cakaudrove, and of being subject 'since they were beaten'. That this present is associated with the dispossession of two kinds - land and polity - makes claims to 'rightful ownership' both a claim to land and to a lost, forgotten, and/or usurped past. Speaking synchronically of these two modes of apprehending socio-political structure, thus, gives the past a politically prospective aspect, to which I will now turn through oral histories of Vunan pre-eminence.

Histories of pre-eminence: 'Tavuki is Vuna, Vuna is not Tavuki'

Fieldnotes, 9th April 2025

Laisiasa, the mata-ni-tikina Vuna, explains to me an origin story for why Tavuki is now part of Cakaudrove province and no longer Vuna. We sit in his house in Navakawau village, drinking kava, as he tells me the people of Tavuki ran away from Vuna after wronging them, fearing the retribution by the Tui Vuna. Thereafter they were written in the Vola ni Kawa Bula (Native Land Register, book of lineages) as part of Cakaudrove, after 1929 when the NLC visited.

'Ohhhh those gang from Tavuki's a robber! Yeah, they steal the food – their job is to take the fish - the turtle - for the chiefly family of Cakaudrove; the Tui Cakau. It's been fished by the people of Navakawau, mataqali Waimakilu; at the time we used to stay at Ura… These people from Waimakilu they will announce in the village; every man in every house, please, let us go to Salialevu, cos there we will make our camp, no one goes to the beach. Make a shed there, drink kava, all to be away from the beach. And only one pan there on the sand, to mark the level of water. When it reaches that, the head of that fishing team, he'll call us and – coconut oil [mimes putting it on] - then we are ready to jump into the sea looking for

turtles… from us to Tui Vuna to Tui Cakau, but before it reached Tui Cakau, the people of Tavuki cooked it and ate it!

…

But where we can understand that we are from the same place, that we are related to each other, we have a tabu. If we are going to Tavuki, we eat pork, they don't eat pork. When they come to Vuna, if fish are ready, we people from Vuna don't eat fish, only them. That is the veiwekani; the way we are related to each other. Kinship. Tavuki and Vuna. If we want to go Tavuki we just go, they want to come down to Vuna they come down. And the farmland for Tavuki is still in Vuna, still in Vuna district, because they can't kill the land!'

The totems of Vuna suggest an 'itchy people' as 'they all start with the teeth'.[168] Laisiasa interweaves totemic interrelation with species of fish, animal, tree, and crop within an elder/younger narrative archetype:

Laisiasa: 'Shark attack, dog attack, this one too attack (pointing to salato; a totemic tree), and that one too (pointing to taro leaves; totemic food) if it's not well cooked, it attacks. Better for you to be attacked by those three than the waci (taro leaves), very itchy! That's where the human and its environment is related; related to your trees, animals, sea animals, and related to what you eat. Because from the beginning we are the last one to be created. The land there, the trees there, the fish there, the sea there, birds, and all those things. After the fifth day, then; Adam and Eve, on the last day [claps]. So, we are the youngest, but we always wanted to be the eldest.'

The tautological aspect of my questions around issues of pre-eminence was not lost on some interlocutors: 'If Vuna is the question, Vuna is the answer' (Peni). Vuna, is approximately translated as 'source' or 'origin': 'all the routes to Bau, to Lau, all the higher chiefs in Fiji, all the roots we have it in Vuna' (Bale). The first Tui Cakau who came to Taveuni was installed in Vuna in the priest's house, and stayed in a place called 'Nasima', which is now the name of the *yavu* (foundation) of the provincial council office in Somosomo, as well as the chiefly *yavu* in Mualevu on Vanuabalavu.[169] In the account by Peni, a member of Tui Vuna's *mataqali* (Vusaratu), the Tui Vuna made the Tui Cakau chief in Vuna:

[168] Vuna totems: shark (fish), salato *(laportea harveyi)* (tree), dog (animal), pig/taro leaves (food).
[169] The name 'Nasima' was one of intrigue for the present Tui Vuna: 'even myself, I still search for what they mean by Nasima'. The mata-ni-tikina of Vuna, remarked that the '*sima'* is the name of the smoked black tapa (*masi tuvui*) which is held like a mast behind the Tui Vuna. Sayes (1982, p.9, pp143-44) mentions that when Yavala, the fourth Tui Cakau, fled to Vuna with his son during the reign of his father, he was given a house by the Tui Vuna, which was named Nasima, the name he then took for his home in Somosomo later.

'Not the eldest, the second eldest; and the eldest tells the second eldest: you drink - you drink, because I will stay here in our mother's place, I will stay here, and you will go to the other place… They're all called Vasu Vuna, but the eldest is here.'

Later, when they were drinking grog, the chief turned the *tanoa* (kava bowl) so that the *wa-ni-sau* (sinnet rope with cowry shell ornament) faced the person mixing as a sign of customary respect, because he was the eldest. He recounts that much later it was only through deceitful tactics that Tui Vuna's pre-eminence was ceded, as Tui Cakau had kidnapped the chief's daughter who had been married to the Tui Cakau's son, and he threatened to kill her unless the Tui Vuna stepped down.

The name Tavuki, on the other hand, translates as 'to turn upside down', which had divergent interpretations amongst interlocutors. Some referenced the Battle of Wairiki and eating of Wainiqolo's heart, *tavu vukivuki* meaning 'to roast in a rotating motion'. Mere suggested it was concerned with what you attempt to enact getting turned upside down, whilst Inoke described it as an inversion of what was before 'upside down', eliciting the movement of Ratu Mua moving from Vuna to rule the scattered peoples in and around Wairiki: 'the bottom part will be on top, the top will be on the bottom'. The notion of *tavuki* (to turn upside down) was also referred to when discussing Fiji's relationship with the Holy Land, as when Hebrew symbols were found on rocks in Dakuniba (*Vatu Vola*), across the Somosomo strait, under which was also found oil, making the sand black:

Fieldnotes, 20th March 2024

Fabi: '*They say when we drill that kerosene, the whole world is gonna run out of kerosene.'*

Epeli: 'Because Fiji is on the bottom, eh.'

Fabi: 'You take the kerosene from the bottom and take it all like that [turning his hands upside down] that's when Fiji will become the richest country in the world.'

Inversions offer both explanatory potential for pasts of pre-eminence and visions of future eminence, indicative of the notion of power and wealth as always *in process.*

Tavuki eventually turned away from the Tui Vuna towards the Tui Cakau around 1854, after the death of the sixth Tui Cakau, Tuikilakila. It was then that the Tavuki people asked one of the members of the Ai Sokula (the chiefs of the *Vanua* of *Lalagavesi* who came to Taveuni) that won the leadership contest to live with them in Wairiki.[170] In Techi's telling of the story of the formation of Tavuki and its eventual

[170] Sayes (1982, p.188) says that explanations for this are 'anecdotal': perhaps a wife of an earlier Tui Vuna had insulted the Tavuki people as she had told them to go away with their *i sevu* of snakes, or the Vuna *turaga* had killed a Tavuki man and presented him as the *i coi* (food accompaniment) of a ceremonial feast (*magiti*) for the Ai Sokula, this explanation was also held by the Ai Sokula.

disunion from Vuna, the brothers Ratu Mua (the elder brother who left Vuna to found Tavuki) and Ratu Napolioni-Siga (the younger brother who stayed in Vuna) become emblematic of an inversion of power. In this narrative, the diminished identity of Tavuki, submerged by the wider polity of Cakaudrove, is by extension also the narrative of the diminishing of Vuna's prominence.

> *Techi: 'Here they are the bati, they carry the wau, stand up there, anything they come across: pfff, wow! They are the warrior of the vanua, they are the warrior. Up there, no. They are just like the servant, who are labour up there, they don't know… they don't know why they are labour there.'*

Historical knowledge continues to be source of prestige and power, making the past – and how it is remembered – important to people. Interlocutors often referred to the fact that only by knowing the 'full story' could present day arrangements of land and polity be understood.[171] In assessing claims of 'rightful ownership', archetypal stories of elder/younger brothers, those who 'drink first', and the implicit historical resonances of contemporary traditional addresses make the past of present concern and of indeterminate character. Loss of the *bati*, often translated as 'warrior', but also: 'borderers' (defined as 'subjects of a *matanitu*, but not so directly as a *qali'*),[172] is tantamount to losing sovereignty as one's 'border' is undone, and those '*qali'* (subjects) are now borderless, without the 'long tooth' (*bati balavu*) that offers protection. How this process of integration into Cakaudrove took place will be the focus of the following section of this chapter, as knowledge of the 'full story' comes to be marked by an appreciation for the indeterminate nature of the polity in pre-colonial Fijian society.

Sayes (1984) has argued that pre-colonial Fiji was marked not by static, small-scale local chiefdoms, but rather by an evolving interplay of various *vanua* into *matanitu* (confederated chiefdoms); complex political hierarchies forming, amalgamating, and being overcome by other arrangements. The spread of influence from power centres to '*qali vanua'* (villages subject to others) was predominantly the result of narratives of shared descent and histories of migration. In her account of the oral history, Vuna's rise to pre-eminence across northern Lau and the islands surrounding Taveuni, in the years before the Ai Sokula, is euphemistically told in the story of an ancestor hero, who 'probably symbolises

[171] Vakavanua arrangements are often represented by physical symbols in the land, such as the piping of water between two places symbolising the sharing of water rights. The historical connection resides in stories and thus rights can be threatened when these stories are not widely known. See Nabobo-Baba (2015) for discussion of the 'gifting' of land/water rights '*vakaveiwekani*' (in the manner of kinship) as a symbol of Fijian ethos of 'love and empathy for kin', wherein *'sega ni kauwai'* refers to neglect, ignorance of importance of gifting, or ignorance of relationships.
[172] Capell, 2018.

a colonisation and power extension which may have continued over a period of time'.[173] This ancestor who left Vuna went to search for his own land in Lakeba (settling the village of Nasaqalau), and on his return left some of his people at Tuvuca, Mago, Vanua Balavu, Kanacea, Yacata, Naitauba, and Laucala, all of which became subject (*qali*) to Vuna.[174]

> *'From the links Vuna retains, and the evidence of population movements and leadership takeovers, it is clear that Vuna was once a centre of power. Its influence at one time extended outside the later Cakaudrove matanitu, to Lakeba in southern Lau. But Vuna, which had expanded at the expense of Laucalan interests, was to find its own power curtailed by the i Sokula.'*[175]

The Tui Cakau and his A*i Sokula* lineage were thought of by their subjects as sacred; 'the descendants and representatives of the ancestor-gods and as such gods themselves'.[176] Their rule was by right, not by might, and in the 1820-1830s their paramountcy reached its peak, spanning most of southern Vanua Levu from Savusavu Bay to Udu Point, as well as the northern Lau group of islands, with its centre of power in Somosomo, in the middle of Taveuni. As the prosperity of the land relied upon the religious observance of the *isevu* (first-fruits presentation), which assured the good graces of the ancestor-gods, through the mediator; the Tui Cakau, failures of the land could be tautologically read as both failures of the observance of the power structure, and of the Tui Cakau himself, one notion circularly reinforcing the other.

Taking into account the caution outlined above regarding oral traditions, Sayes finds much confirmatory evidence that the Ai Sokula's rule over the province of Cakaudrove was one in a line of varied power arrangements that was contested through frequent warfare, subjugation, and strategic kinship relations. Previous *matanitu* of conjoined local chiefdoms under a paramount chief included Laucala, which was then superseded by Vuna, which eventually was overcome by Cakaudrove.[177] The balance of power has never been static; the pre-eminence of the Ai Sokula over Vuna and wider Cakaudrove rested on the dual notion of 'sacred' and 'temporal' power, though the ideology of the sacrality of the Tui Cakau was often, in real terms, a factor of their varied ability to exhibit temporal power.[178] In the final section, I will explore the question of power more directly in relation to Fijian

[173] Sayes, 1984, p.19.
[174] Ibid., p.18.
[175] Ibid., p.20.
[176] Ibid., p.3.
[177] Ibid., p.14-16.
[178] Sayes, 1982, p.166. Note: historical disputes within the Ai Sokula regarding succession are symptomatic of reconciling long histories of keeping separate genealogical rank and political status; with one not needing to correspond with the other. In idealised terms, the *yavusa* Cakaudrove comprises a descent group, in which the head is the genealogically senior descendant of a common apical ancestor, but this is – historically and in the present – a power construct (Ibid., pp.83-84). As one prime example of this discordance, Ratu Epeli Ganilau, son of former Tui Cakau and Fijian President Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau,

chieftaincy and rightful installation. In doing so I will focus on the indeterminacies produced by claims to 'originality' by ancient polities that contrast with fixed notions of political power as imagined by the *black and white*, drawing on the deep temporality of Fijian political alignments and different modes of legitimation.

Indeterminacies of the polity: stranger chief and the original peoples

In the aftermath of the Battle of Wairiki, the Tui Cakau Goleanavanua sold much land to early European settlers seeking to take advantage of the global cotton boom.[179] The reason for these sales is debated in the historical literature. Whilst many of my interlocutors suggested that Golea was 'retaliating' against those subject islands that did not fight for him in the battle, historical sources suggest a plethora of reasons for his actions. Did he, as Sayes (1982) offers, prefer European settlers owning land to Ma'afu owning this same land? Thurston's comments certainly support this; *'Thakombau [sic] had no choice; but, of the two things, liked white robbers a little better than the Tongan ones'.*[180] Was it otherwise, as Pauwels (2015) argues; that he like many chiefs wanted to gain the capital needed to procure Western goods?[181] Perhaps to acquire ammunitions in case of more warfare with the Tongans? Or has, as Spurway (2015) suggests, the concerns European settlers had over Tongan power – their customary laws would make it illegal to sell land to foreigners – been diluted by the colonial records?[182] Indeed, in Golea's own recollections on the sales, he offered up variations on each of these reasonings.[183]

In my interlocutors' commentaries on these early land sales, a distinction is made between the 'stranger chief' Tui Cakau, local chiefs, and the Fijian commoner.[184] This difference displaces the dichotomy of agency and victimhood, so vexing to Pacific historians, into indigenous categories that imply different forms of power and responsibility.[185] As Sahlins noted, the ubiquity of the 'stranger-king' in polities across history is evidence of the sourcing of power from usurpation, alterity, and a negation of kinship behaviour.[186] Whilst an 'enduring tension' eventuates between the stranger-chief

lodged a supreme court case against Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, after Lalabalavu succeeded his father as the Tui Cakau in 1999. Both were members of the chiefly *mataqali Valelevu*. The supreme court decided in Lalabalavu's favour.

[179] For example, Tui Cakau sold the islands of Kanacea (1863) and Laucala (1865).

[180] Thurston in Land Claims Commission, R305, quoted in: France, 1966, p.131.

[181] Pauwels, 2015, p.190.

[182] Spurway, 2015, p.223, 242.

[183] See: Sayes, 1982, pp.295-302.

[184] Sahlins, 1981, 2008.

[185] See Chappell, 1995.

[186] Sahlins, 1981, p.111-13.

and the iTaukei (those *of the land*), he points to this intermarriage as essential: 'the acquisition of alterity is the condition both of fertility and identity'.[187] The dualism of the stranger-chief is never completely resolved, however, and he is neither outsider nor insider but rather *beyond* this duality.

The *strangeness* of the Tui Cakau is sourced from the origin story of his Ai Sokula clan on the mainland of Vanua Levu. The first Tui Cakau was said to have emerged as if being washed up on a reef (*cakau*) and whilst having merged with the *taukei* of the land, he remains a half-foreign entity; a 'mediating figure' between the land and the sea who displaces iTaukei rulers.[188] This displacement likely took place as the Ai Sokula people helped the Cakaudrove people (the Mataikoro people led by Mai Nakamakama) in combat against Veratan (of eastern Viti Levu) hegemony. In turn, the Ai Sokula were presented with a *marama* (woman of high rank) of the Cakaudrove people, who birthed a son: Rokevu, who became the first Tui Cakau, representing both the Ai Sokula (his father) and the iTaukei (his mother).[189] The second Tui Cakau, Ratavo, moved the Ai Sokula from Vanua Levu to Taveuni around the end of the 18th-century or beginning of the 19th-century, as a result of the intensity of internal power disputes on the mainland, which made him stranger still to the people of Taveuni.[190]

> *Inoke: 'We don't know where he came from… It's not our father, it's not our elders. It's the Tui Cakau who sold that. But it's our land, it's our land… the native did not know… only the power in the Tui Cakau. We have nothing, the chief of our village has nothing.'*

At another time, Inoke extended this critique to the present day:

> *'The land is already sold, they sold it without the owner knowing it… the Tui Cakau saw in the government map the land is still ours… he knows… they are all the same, because their fathers sold our land.'*

In pre-colonial Fiji, it was common after a power struggle, in which an invading people subjugated those already present in a land, the 'displaced leaders' would be made *sau turaga* to these new, more

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[187] Sahlins, 2008, p.184.

[188] Sayes, 1982 pp.37-39, p.42-43. Note: In some tellings, the first Tui Cakau's twin was to become the shark-god Dakuwaqa. This story has lots of parallels with that of the origin tradition of the great ancestor-god (*kalou vu*) Ratumaibula, whose descendants were a man and a woman collectively known as Tomaniivi. Tomaniivi had two children who were *drua dadakulaci* (sea snake twins, one a boy and one a girl), with the sister sea-snake, Tikinivula, being known as '*liga-ni-magiti* (preparer of foods): 'meaning the prosperity of the land was in her hands' (see: Tuwere, 2002, pp.48-49). See also for note on sharks/stranger-chief connection: Sahlins, 1981, p.112.

[189] Sayes, 1982, pp.62-63. Note: In the discrete act of power extension, marital ties and kinship relations helped the Ai Sokula gain access to the wealth of the mother's land (Ibid., p.116, p.119).

[190] Ibid., p.37, p.41. Sayes finds many contrasting narratives surrounding the origins of the Ai Sokula, which maintain its essential 'mystery', with possible originating sites in Moala, Lakeba, Kabara, or even Tonga. She finds the most compelling that they likely came from the West, as part of a 'colonising drive' of the Veratans.

powerful chiefs.[191] The *sau turaga* plays a central role in the iTaukei social structure within the village, being the 'kingmakers' who appoint the chief, ritually selecting the individual from the chiefly clan by placing a reed at their door. I suggest that the persisting role of the *sau turaga* is emblematic of a theology of the land that maintains the indeterminate character of Fijian land ownership and notions of power. Through reference to *sau turaga* as 'original peoples', my interlocutors employ a retrospective critique of chiefly power that is rooted in histories of dispossession by *strange* chiefs. *Sau turaga* are, as Inoke notes:

> '*The people that really belong to this land…anyone can become chief, if you know you can lead, you have the brain, the sau turaga can appoint you chief. But the sau turaga is chief. He anoints the chief, no one else can get that power too. If I am the sau turaga and I give you the bowl to become chief, you automatically become sau. Sau means whatever you say, it happens; sau'.*

Those villages missing the *sau turaga* are said to be lacking in *sau*, an entwinement of land-based legitimation and fertility; both *of the land*, and *of the polity*.

> Fieldnotes, Vuna village, 9th January 2024
>
> *I walk through a part of the village called Torokina, named after Cape Torokina on the island of Bougainville where villagers from Vuna had first landed and fought in the Bougainville Campaign 1943-1945. I was told that during this campaign Fijian soldiers had spotted wild taro leaves high up in a tree and, knowing they should not be there, had opened fire at the hiding Japanese soldiers. The British and Americans had missed this clue of the jungle. The land in this part of the village had been gifted to five villagers for 'representing Vuna' in this campaign, through the traditional ceremony of qusi-ni-loaloa. A few kids outside point me in the direction of Na Moli, a popular beach in Vuna for picnics. There is a solitary house on the left of the path where the sau turaga, Techi, lives. When I arrive, he is seated on the veranda and from here we sit watching passersby as they go to-and-fro the beach. He asks if I have been there, I say not yet. 'During my school days it was on the cover page of Fiji tourism magazine. It's just a small beach – it's a big beach – after Cyclone Winston it's a small beach, but people like it'.*
>
> *The lali (wooden drum) is beaten, reverberating throughout the village, I ask whether it is time for church, and he laughs shaking his head: 'It's happy new year, it's just one day but we can have it two weeks, three weeks… Fiji, the way the world should be,' he smiles. A week since new year's, his extended family of around forty or fifty have returned to their homes in Suva, the United States, and elsewhere. He remarks that he is the middle sibling, and sixteen-years*

[191] Sayes, 1982, p.91.

ago he decided to come back to the village and took up the role of sau turaga. His eldest brother retired high up in the Fijian police force.

'When they come here, they're all rich, I'm poor, I just sit here. They go there, buy this, buy that, bring this, here here here, when they go back, here I am alone with this moce tree, sitting here with nothing, but at that time they arrive, pooow I'm on top of that tree, they buy this, bring this here, we go there, go there, when they go back - under the tree again, sitting on the veranda, staring at these people, 'cos they're all working, they have what they want… I was there, for three years, then I came back, to help my dad and mum… I was there, maybe if I didn't come back we'd have met in England'.

Techi did not want to take the role of sau turaga, it is unpaid – 'it is not a salusalu' (garland) - it just offers you respect: 'they know who I am'. His remarks about his family, those who are 'vutu-ni-yau' (wealthy), and his eldest giving him the permission to take on the role of sau turaga, echoes the entwined contemporary and historical import of pre-eminence within familial relations. Relating the story of his great-great-great-great grandfather's older brother Ratu Mua, the chief who decided to move up to Tavuki, he says: 'If he's here with his brother, his brother will just listen to him, he [Ratu Napolioni] has no role. He can't move there and say I'm a chief, there's the older brother; all the people know there's the older brother, they will go there kill him'.[192]

During the installation of the current Tui Vuna, a parallel ceremony was held by some villagers which resulted in a period of contested leadership; 'gauna buliruarua' (the time of the double installation).

> *'Before I give the cup to this one to be the chief, there was a ceremony for another chief; the next day was the ceremony for this one… Just in this village, just this clan, some go here, some go there, then comes the Ministry of Fijian Affairs. See, that's good where we have the black and white, and they say; well who should be the king; this one…*
>
> *When the Ministry of Fijian Affairs come, they just go by the book, they don't know what happened in the past because there's no black and white… but when the black and white comes, just read it; it's okay… they will not read what I tell you.'*

[192] Ratu Napolioni is the younger brother of Ratu Mua (who led Vuna people up to Tavuki), his sister is Elawali, who was married to Nacamaki, Koro island, in Lomaiviti province. Ratu Napolioni had a son, Ratu Lui, who had a son Ratu Lui, whose son Sakopo was Techi's father.

Tension in the recourse to the *black and white* is felt by the simultaneity of its role in settlement of dispute (through genealogical reference to the *Vola ni Kawa Bula*, for example) and role in misrecognition, obscuration, and alienation. Techi spoke of the days when the Tui Cakau sold pieces of his grandfather's land as he had a son he wanted to go to university in New Zealand ('we just listened to the chiefs in those days'), and the black and white now 'hurting the people again', a return of governmentality that only further disempowered those it deems rightful landowners. Across Fiji this sense of distrust of officialdom has led some villagers to rent land outside of the strictures of the Taukei Land Trust Board (TLTB), in informal arrangements between landowning *mataqalis* and tenants, to avoid the government coming 'inside'.

That the government 'just goes by the book' is synonymous with histories of routinised power exaction that privileges the written word and, in turn, challenges oral histories that represent the past as unresolved. When discussing the first land commissions which recorded villagers, Inoke notes that the context of persistent tribal warfare meant that the 'original peoples' were said to have been scattered and were thus not written down.

> *Inoke: 'Not from then till now, they are not written. They say I am from Tavuki, but I am not from here, I am from Lau. My great-grandfather is Ratu Mua, he is from here… Fijians they didn't write their - [thinking a moment as he lifts his head to the sky] – histories - their family lineages - down. Our stories were in poetry, in meke, in songs, they are still like that, in poetry passed around in stories. So, when the British came and wrote down all the people, they missed the native people because there was war at that time, people moving around, they just wrote down who was there. But the original people of Tavuki, they were not written down, but they are here.'*

Inoke's assertion that 'the native people of Tavuki are not written in that book' is a challenge to the legitimacy of contemporary social organisation founded on the *black and white* of land registration, deeds of title, and iTaukei lineage. Narratives of elder/younger siblings, such as that of Mua/Napolioni-Siga, explain inter-village relations and claims to pre-eminence that persist (exhibited by the addresses given between chiefs).[193] Within Techi's narrative of elder/younger siblings and *sau* lies submerged an ethnohistory of the former pre-eminence of the polity of Vuna and a critique of self-knowledge in southern Taveuni. Tavuki are now said to have 'no role', because 'they don't know themselves' (George). The persistence of oral histories against *black and white* determinacy continues to centre familial relations within land relationality, as many interlocutors shared archetypal stories of

[193] This story could also be told with other names by different clans, such as Seroni (who went up to Tavuki) and Naqereqere (who was Tui Vuna).

elder/younger brothers to explain pre-eminence.[194]. In turn, telling the history of the formation and eventual integration of Tavuki into the chiefly district of Somosomo becomes a means to effect a prospective momentum of indeterminacy, reproducing the dynamic character of provincial polities.

In the narratives I have detailed above, a focus on the twinned notions of pre-eminence and 'originality' provides the frame for the structural distinction between the *stranger chief* Tui Cakau who sold the land, and the iTaukei who have been dispossessed. As Eräsaari (2015) has noted in the context of modern Fiji, where the distinction between *taukei/vulagi (of the land/stranger to the land)* is no longer intra-ethnic but rather inter-ethnic, maintaining the indeterminacy of land ownership, becomes an act of faith that can only be enacted through clan-specific temporal claims to 'originality'. When all indigenous Fijians are 'iTaukei', thus, the previous synthesis of foreign charisma (*vulagi*) and autochthonous legitimation (*iTaukei*) can no longer hold; the *strangeness* of the sea has been consumed by colonial-era *black and white*. In so doing, the Land Commission's orthodoxy (as described in the introduction), has meant 'the stranger grows *unstrange'*.[195] In contrast, the rhetorical *strangeness* of the Tui Cakau is retained through my interlocutors' references to the 'mystery' of his origins. Claims to 'originality', as a form of land-based legitimation, highlight an ongoing cultivation of indeterminacy within the sphere of power and pre-eminence.

The presence of the *sau turaga* is further evidence of the ongoing land-based, autochthonous legitimation of this *strange* entity. It is the 'elective element' of chiefly installation, as Christina Toren states, that allows for the antithetical duality of instituted hierarchy (chief-commoner) and competitive equality (democratic principles) to not merely coexist, but to mutually constitute the other.[196] The *sau turaga*, then, is an ongoing manifestation of the indeterminate character of power; it is given, and it can be taken away. However, as seen in the double installation of a Vunan chief *(gauna buliruarua),* recourse to the *black and white* also symbolises the contemporaneous consumption of *strange* modes of legitimation into the local landscape. Rightful power, akin to rightful ownership, is then a function of two separate modes of legitimation that do not always align. Increasingly, land-based legitimation derives its power from claims to *originality*, drawing on the dynamism of pre-colonial power arrangements that understand the future and its direction to be undetermined, and therein, fertile with the potential for change. Thus, claims to pre-eminence in the distant past must also be heard as socio-political claims in the present and to the future, inverting two interrelated hierarchies:

[194] In disputing claims on this same topic, some suggest instead that the younger brother left Vuna and went up to Tavuki, this story being told '*in order to control us'*, remarked Inoke.
[195] Eräsaari, 2015, p.243-4, *italics* added.
[196] Toren, 1999b, 2000.

epistemological (between *black and white* and oral history) and socio-political (between categorical power and land-based legitimation). In this way, the everyday stories that began this chapter - of land *keeping the score* - simultaneously keep notions of power tethered to the land, and balance formalisation with the enduring indeterminacies that contemporary alignments cannot encompass.

Conclusion

The immutability of *black and white*, exemplified by land titles (such as those given under native grants, to be explored in the following chapter), is a structural problem for the maintenance of indeterminacy. The continuation of notions of land and power as fundamentally indeterminate is made manifest through an ethic of land-based reciprocity that challenges the notion of this immutability. I have shown that individuals draw on deep histories of pre-eminent chiefdoms, traditional identities, and claims to originality to further this logic. Reflexive self-criticisms about *loss* of identity – such as that of Tavuki's role in relation to Vuna - are, also, critiques of the static ideology implicit in the *black and white* and the unequal relationship between different knowledges across colonial history. As I have tried to show, the colonial encounter had a profound impact not only on the present and future of iTaukei, but also on codified conceptions of the *past*. But, as this chapter has highlighted, historical mutability present in oral histories is frequently employed as a socio-political resource to make claims both to the past *and* to the future; the contradictions spoken – *in the same breath* – relate to a negotiated present, which remains unresolved.

The Battle of Wairiki, as a touchstone of Taveuni history, continues to elicit strong feelings, both pride *and* hurt. The sense that there is a lack of recognition of this heroic victory, and the role of the Tunuloans and Yavita, is indicative of the complexity of what came after. Indeed, Tongan power had received its most serious pushback since Ma'afu arrived as a political player, but this fact is often balanced by the sense of 'Pyrrhic victory' due to the events in the years following: extensive land alienation, the formation of the Tovata confederacy in 1867 with Ma'afu as Tui Lau, and what Deniau pointed towards when he remarked that whilst the Wesleyans had 'lost their great spreaders of the Gospel… they took the last option which was left for them: they proposed Cakobau to be king of all Fiji'.[197] The after-effects of a superb victory thus leave some, like Joji, feeling that history has been submerged, consumed by both wider colonial-Bauan narratives of nation-building and local, Catholicised narratives which entwine faith and dispossession. Yavita's name has been 'erased' from records, and the telling of his story continues as a form of recognition of both past, present, *and* future (see Figure 4).

[197] Deniau, n.d., p.104. See also: Spurway, 2015, p.209.

Joji: 'Our great grandparents always said that, like they were never recognised, never. They always say, if it was not for Tunuloa, there would be no Fiji. They always say that. But they were never recognised, no stories, nothing mentioned about this name…nowhere in Fiji you will hear the story of Tongans being defeated, nowhere, only in this place - this land.'

The dominant narrative shared by my interlocutors holds both faith and dispossession in twinned union, each unproblematically eliding into the other. As I have argued, this elision is constitutive of an ethic of *waiting* wherein faith's constitutive indeterminacy is reflected in discourses around 'rightful ownership'. Rather than a challenge to be overcome through further categorisation and incorporation, it is indeterminacy itself which is sought *and* enacted through oral history. In a reciprocity-based society, *waiting* for the 'rightful owners' to be known is both a requirement for harmony and constitutes a form of faith. Within this context, I have engaged critical historiography and foregrounded oral history, showing that the co-existence of overlapping narratives - which increasingly elide - are part of an enduring and unresolved past. With this foundation set, in the following chapters I will explore how interlocutors negotiate indeterminacies across varied terrain – market, land, climate - therein contributing to debates on the 'politics' and 'technologies' of future-making in the Pacific.[198] The everyday negotiations of this cultural reflexivity, more intimately, provokes internal tensions and self-reflections that are often left unresolved – with perennial contradictions emerging from the cracks of the complex mosaic of land tenure in Taveuni.

Figure 4. Photograph of the site of Tovutovu today, where the Battle of Wairiki took place.

[198] See: Bollig, 2018, DeLoughrey, 2019, Tambridge, D'Arcy, and Mawyer, 2021,

Chapter 2

'*He's got a big farm, cos he has no farm*': porosity, possessions, and problematising the border

> *'The answers go way back, I mean, I can't give you a today answer, because today is linked to yesterday, yesterday is linked to last year, and last year is linked to a hundred years ago… Until and unless a boundary is established, it will never end…'*
>
> *– Luke, 16.5.2024*

The control and punishment of theft (*butako*) in Taveuni has become of utmost importance; crops stolen from the plantations of absent farmers are sold to buyers, indistinguishable from the rest. The impact on farmers is not only lost income and wasted labour, but also a sense of distrust in the land to provide for farmers' needs. The prevalence of everyday material theft plays a role in both critiques of the self and of society which foregrounds issues of ownership and appropriation across individualist and communal framings. In this chapter, theft will be defined as entwining both legal and moral facets, wherein people's understandings of what constitutes theft goes beyond dichotomous framings of legality and illegality. How thefts are judged therefore has to do with the symbolic structure of culturally specific property relations in which they take place. Throughout this chapter, the heuristic of the borderlands will be used to reflect the complicated, multi-layered property relations within indigenous Fijian society. Farmers' everyday border crossing across the complex mosaic of land tenure in Taveuni make conceptual worlds of ownership apparent (freehold/leasehold/native), suggesting distinct spatialised socialities. Similarly, the conceptual worlds of exchange (market/sharing/*kerekere*) suggest modalities that reflect ideas of personhood and agency that, however, frequently fail to remain within their borders.

In this chapter I will argue that the occurrence of everyday material theft in Taveuni has made for frequent self-interrogation and cultural critique in relation to property, extending reflexively to the borders – both visible, invisible, and latent – that encompass lands. The everyday border crossings of farmers, and prevalence of *vakavanua* (in the way of the land) arrangements on freehold land, mirror the conceptual blurring of worlds of exchange. In this way, the 'thief' can be viewed as *both* traditional requests made of others' property (*kerekere*), which are frequently lamented as being pernicious, *and* its apparent opposite; modernity's commercialism. As conceptual borders increasingly struggle to hold between different modes of exchange, the result is a crisis of the self which seeks to find its place in this moral order. Sitting one day in the house of Lavenia, her son just having gotten back from working on mending the fence of a man from New Zealand who lives in a freehold plot in Naiyalayala, a nearby cooperative of freehold plots, she winces as she tells me that the last person who worked for him had

damaged the fence, stealing ten sheep, and has not been seen since. She pauses, then adds that she heard it was because the worker was not being paid enough. The subtle distinction that there was perhaps an exploitative relationship that caused this theft suggests that its morality is unclear; theft can be a form of resistance when other political options are lacking, or theft can also be said to express attempts at establishing relationships of equality. In one instance, my neighbour told me that a recent theft inside someone's house had been caused by a 'showing' of wealth. Indeed, in situations where there is perceived inequality or non-reciprocity, theft may well be interpreted as 'natural justice' or for the 'common good':

> '[W]hat is regarded as theft from a legal point of view may be redefined as just from a moral point of view, and *vice versa.'* [199]

Inversely then, what has been deemed rightful exchange from a legal point of view may be held as *unjust* from a moral point of view; *moral theft* and *immoral exchange* thus blurring conceptual boundaries. As E.P. Thompson wrote of the 'moral economy' it was commonly outrages to 'moral assumptions' during periods of dearth, when people could not afford their basic provisions, which incited direct action of consumers; challenging the economic view that *hunger* was the primary reason for these 'riots', he notes: 'men and women near to starvation nevertheless attacked mills and granaries, not to *steal* the food, but to *punish* the proprietors'.[200] Indeed, here the very distinction between *stealing* and *attacking* is an assertion of morality, where the *immorality* of millers who variously horde grain, fix prices, or export in times of need, is attacked. When a consumer's *price populaire* is unequivocally rejected, the taking of goods *becomes* morally justified. Thompson concludes, then, that economic history, having been consumed by a political economy that removes moral imperatives, frequently conceals the *moral* bases for responses to exploitative economic practices.[201] The concept of moral ecology, which extends this argument to colonial forms of environmentalism, similarly argues that 'social crimes' – for example, *trespass* - enacted with local support are not merely 'illegal' but rather frequently acts of dissent and continuances of old practices, rights, and beliefs.[202] As the previous chapter explored, feelings of injustice persist over historical land sales and continue to evoke concerns over the economic *and* moral implications of these sales. Indeed, even in the early days of colonial land commissions, questions regarding the Deed of Cession's fourth article, pertaining to '*bona fide'* claims to property, gestured beyond merely considerations of 'fair

[199] Engerbrigtsen, 2008, p.133.
[200] Thompson, 1971, p.114, *italics* added.
[201] Ibid., p.136.
[202] Griffin et al., 2019.

price' alone.[203] In turn, this chapter assumes a wider socio-moral framing than a purely economic one to analyse the category of 'theft'.

My focus will turn to the ways in which everyday thefts invite renewed appraisals of property relations with increasing attention paid to the *affect* of exchange. Throughout my fieldwork, interlocutors shared the ambivalent sense that much of the good, flat, fertile, and coastal lands of Taveuni had been made freehold. Whilst, on the one hand, this was viewed as providing opportunities for Indo-Fijians (especially) and others to buy and/or lease land in profitable endeavours, iTaukei who farmed on village land lamented the combined effect of decreasing soil fertility and intergenerational land division, summed up by one young man – who had many brothers: 'the land is getting smaller'. When one man from Vuna, who I assumed was being bashful, stated that: 'the *real* paradise of Taveuni is in the south', a sense of mournfulness was also apparent as we talked of the fence not a hundred metres from where we spoke. The fence, introduced by missionaries, notably first functioned to secure crops, but also as a form of moral separation between the missionaries and the village, and soon enclosed lands far greater than the extent of cultivation.[204] As Lin (2012, 2015) shows, the 'capitalist glance' which surveyed land as desirable in the eyes of early planters, categorising the leftovers as either: 'native or nature', is reflected in the mosaic of land tenure patterning and colonial-era plantation spatiality of the south.[205] In their journeys through this *unevenness* farmers define landscapes anew through everyday movements. In this way, the border – as signifier of material boundaries *and* of the edges of discursive worlds of exchange – is where tensions of moral and legal kinds are best approached. These variously latent, visible, and invisible boundaries are crossed daily and in this way are both reified and blurred into one another.

The nature of land possession continues to *possess* the island and invites questions that go beyond rightful ownership, to understandings of *ownership* itself. Often without visible markers (for example: enclosing fences, border posts), interlocutors pass across different lands constantly, engaging in activities on farms variously freehold, leasehold, or native. Borders can be signalled by a row of a different type of taro or a few banana trees, acknowledged as forming a division of space and thereby: labour. These various *borders* divide farms, bind plantations, delineate the private from the public, and represent new, old, accepted, and/or contested divisions within a socio-ecological landscape. As Abramson (2000) has noted, the traditional structure of the *vanua* is a 'centrifugal emanation', wherein the ritual centre is managed by patriclan assemblies, but the boundary being of 'no fixed circumference' invites more ambiguity. Thus, with the introduction of land law, border disputes

[203] Legge, 1958, pp.178-9.
[204] France, 1966, p.87-90.
[205] Lin, 2012, p.48.

become the domain of the Taukei Land Trust Board (TLTB), where pure categories are sought between *here* and *there*, *owner* and *trespasser*.

The indigenous Fijian landscape, as Hau'ofa (2008) has noted, is comprised of history, in the form of names, sacred sites, and monuments of former polities. The sight of the sign: '*Private Property: No Trespassing'* is, however, a relatively newer landmark from which, also, a history can be read. It is neither a purely discursive or material object, nor does it divide pure forms (private/public, used/unused, productive/unproductive). Indeed, encountering one of these signs one day with an interlocutor, Joseph, I hesitate. He continues, turning to me: 'It's okay if we stay on the path'. Later, when discussing the appearance of these signs with Robert, a taro buyer, he responds by saying it must have been the house of a European.

> *Robert: 'For Fijians, there is no problem - for Fijians. For Indians, you do that to Indians, they're gonna chase you with a cane knife, yes! European too. No, they won't use the knife, they use the gun. Pang! Make you run. But Fijian: hey! where are you going? Hey, I'm going that side. Hey, come come, have a glass of water, come come!*
>
> *You see? That's the difference. But, if the European guy owns that land: hey you arsehole! Where you going? Stand there, get the gun, shoot this fella! [laughing]'*

Robert makes clear that despite the acknowledgement of a legal parity in property ownership, a racialised discourse sustains in understandings of *property*. In another instance, a man laughed as he told me that whilst Fijians are friendly, I was not to expect that if I left something on the bus that it will be there for very long. In contrast, he said, in China if you leave something it will be there tomorrow in that same place; but he clarifies his point: 'there, they won't even say hello to you!'. The implicit suggestion, I think, is that friendliness and stealing both constitute an intimacy of sorts, of self *and* property as both communally sourced and *owned*.

In focusing on discursive and material borders, I follow Gershon (2019), in an appreciation that interlocutors create, negotiate, and reject borders daily as they live among multiple social orders. Beyond the conception of multiple ontologies, a focus on borders centralises the zones of interaction between social orders, where porousness becomes a central concern not only of the ethnographer, but of interlocutors who reflect and manoeuvre between different frames of reference. Further to the notion of *porous* borders, Instone's (1999) concept of '*queer(y)ing'* the ubiquity of this dividing instrument of landscape instead foregrounds its role in connecting; fluidly, dynamically, and permeably; both spatialities (as in neighbouring farms) and temporalities (as in historical narratives that contribute to their social construction).

The discursive and material reality of borders in Taveuni often fails to 'divide' – as Joseph highlights walking past the sign – illuminating interpretations of ownership that pervade everyday movements. Never fully succeeding in its efforts to divide and form pure categories, neither is the seeming lack of a *border* a sign of a deterritorialised, anti-place. In one sense, this is an acknowledgement of the *invisible* borders between indigenous polities, wherein entry is negotiated through traditional ceremony (*isevusevu*). Moreover, it is where *difference* in the landscape is found within and through social relations that speak of historical entanglement, present-day endowment, and on-going relations of reciprocity. As geographers Newman and Paasi (1998, p.196) highlight, boundaries are but 'one part of the discursive landscape of social power, control and governance… which is produced and reproduced in various social and cultural practices'. In this discursive landscape, the socio-spatial self is similarly made – and re-made – by the border, in *its* image. Taking the position of the border, then, is to take up the region of dynamism, relationality, and at times: contestation. From this in-between zone, we are in the constant state of go-between; between past and present, here and there, rightful owner and trespasser.

Taking borders as part of the social construction of property, then, is to ask underlying questions of property that are increasingly asked by farmers in Taveuni, reflecting an anthropological interest in the relatively mundane acts (walking past a sign, for example) that elicit theoretical concerns about ownership and appropriation. In light of a recent spate of crop stealing, and as farmers reeled from the impact of these thefts, the entwinement of legal, moral, and cultural aspects into the question of property and theft led to a problematising of indigenous communality as at odds with the individualised rationale of *homo economicus*. In the final part of this chapter I will focus on theft as part of a bifurcated discourse of, on the one hand; indigenous property *ownership* as constituted by social relations, and on the other; social relations making theft difficult to prevent and/or punish. I will foreground the internal conflict elicited by a relatively new economic and moral order; as individuals, incited by increasing theft of cash crops, reflectively *que(e)ry* the neat delineation between different forms of dispossession, variously considered *modern* and *traditional*.

Wiping away the darkness: cases of *qusi ni loaloa*

In this first section, I will briefly explore cases of *qusi ni loaloa* (lit. wiping away the darkness), a *vakavanua* (in the way of the land) form of gifting land by a chief in gratitude for an act of service, in order to explain how land claims are understood, evidenced, and maintained, and how this contrasts with etic visions of land development. Before the *black and white*, continuous cultivation largely sustained claims to land through use, *cultivating memory* in the communal consciousness. Land rights

given by chiefs of previous eras could be 'forgotten' or 'fade away' wherein the rights would return to the communal pool of resources. Challenges made by those who claimed rights based on these faded histories invited criticism or '*jealousy'*, as one interlocutor put it. Indeed, without visible *landmarks*, in Hau'ofa's terms reading history *into* the landscape requires corroboration from others to support claims to land.[206] The iTaukei Lands Act highlights the traditional authority of gifting land and, in turn, how these gifts endure:

> '*iTaukei lands shall be held by iTaukei according to iTaukei custom as evidenced by usage and tradition… in the event of any dispute arising for legal decision in which the question of the tenure of land amongst iTaukei is relevant all courts of law shall decide such disputes according to such regulations or iTaukei custom and usage which shall be ascertained as a matter of fact by the examination of witnesses capable of throwing light thereupon'.*[207]

Claims to land that span generations invite the most speculation as 'witnesses capable of throwing light thereupon' may hold passed down, contested narratives. Evidence often comprises not only corroboration through people's testimony, but also from land-based reciprocities which, as explored in the previous chapter, suggest the rightness/wrongness of the claim. In an example of *qusi-ni-loaloa,* the Tui Cakau gifted land to the Tunuloan warlord Joji Yavita on the shoreline of Wairiki, in gratitude: 'as a token for war'. It was this same place he was also 'given the cup' to become Tui Tunuloa. This land was during the colonial period, however, leased to Carpenters, who also had 'ownership' of Naiyalayala, directly across the road and above this plot, reaching high up into the hills towards Des Voeux Peak. Presently, the land is under a ninety-nine-year lease to a man from the chiefly *mataqali* Valelevu in Somosomo, the land being the site of his *beche-du-mer* operation co-managed with Chinese exporters. Joji suggested the Tui Cakau 'knew' the land belonged to Yavita's lineage, yet nothing could be done about it at present.

In another example, the land under question was gifted only one generation previously, so elderly witnesses who were present at the original gifting ceremony some six-decades previously were called upon to provide evidence. Under the iTaukei Lands Act, these people were 'capable of throwing light' on the past in ways that aligned with custom. The risks of *forgetting* were apparent to the present Tui Cakau when on the 15th October 2011, he undertook a *matanigasau* ceremony towards the people of the *yavusa* Tokaimalo, who had their traditional rights to the land of Koroqele, in Somosomo, unjustly disregarded over a long period of time, including the building of a school on their land without any form of consultation. Not only was this act an act of forgetting, but the omission also *forgot* the

[206] Hau'ofa, 2008.
[207] iTaukei Lands Act, 1905, Section 3.

gratitude with which the land was initially given by the Tui Cakau. The gifting took place after a seven-year war that began in 1846 to the people from Bureloa in Ra province, who had answered the war-cry *(tagi valu)* to fight for him against an uprising in Natewa. However, unfortunate happenings in the land had made the impossibility of forgetting apparent. The Tui Cakau remarked then:

> *'Na vanua e vakamatana, vakadaligana, e dau tagi talega' (the land has eyes, has eyes, and it also cries).*[208]

The Tui Cakau's own people were said to have been none too pleased with his plans to return the land, as they 'knew nothing of what transpired in the past'.[209] The question then becomes, once again, what counts as evidence; land-based reciprocities and oral histories (described in Chapter 1), the corroboration of individuals, the words of the present Tui Cakau, or indeed the act of *forgetting* itself as negative evidence. Forgetting denotes a slippage out of communal consciousness, mirroring the way the land returns to the wild and communal pool of resources. This slippage from domesticated to wild, remembered to forgotten, can also be imagined as a *return* to darkness. Inversely, then, *qusi-ni-loaloa* as 'wiping away the darkness' can be read as both a form of cultivation and of commemoration. Land acts as the bridge between the past and future in this regard, where memory is continually cultivated and, inversely, the lack of cultivation takes on moral implications as *acts of forgetting* which reflect negative connotations of 'the bush'. Herein, perceived negligence is often attached to racialised sentiment:

> *Krishnil, an Indo-Fijian taxi-driver, says as we drive through the tall grasses on either side which increasingly overarch into the road: 'Without us Indians, all of this would be bush!' He moved from Labasa in recent years, saying he was one of many, the neighbourhoods they once lived in now 'all empty, balabala there now', a very tall tree signifying to him: neglect.*
>
> *Luke: 'You jump on the plane, you fly to Suva; all you see is bloody jungle after jungle after jungle man! If this was Chinese or Asia, planting rice…'*

In both statements, the ostensible *lack* of cultivation (*all empty, jungle after jungle*) is a moral judgement that also reflects racialised sentiment in regard to land practices, reflective of colonial framings which have long been a recurring theme for politicisation.[210] I want to focus not on the racial component (which will emerge again in the next chapter), but rather on the implicit agreements and

[208] Fiji Times, 22 September 2014. Note: In the 1980s, when the land became earmarked for development by the chiefly *mataqali*, bad events proceeded; for example, a stone cliff crumbled and the soil eroded into the valley below where a school that had been built there had been put in danger, followed by the 'unexplained deaths' of those involved in the removal of the *qusi ni loaloa*.
[209] Ibid.
[210] See Lal, 1992 and Rokolekutu, 2007.

disagreements that underly these sentiments. As Instone (1999, p.376) terms it; the 'boundary script' tells and retells the '*presumed inevitability of progression to an agricultural landscape… [which] submerges other possible relations under the heading of waste, wild, and unproductive'*. The lack of boundaries in the above cases of *qusi-ni-loaloa* and the return to bush marks, in this script, the inversion of progression, submerging other frames of relationality as waste/unproductive/*forgotten*.

Luke, a descendent of the early-settler Tarte family and manager at Wainiyaku estate, quoted the Biblical phrase *'good fences make good neighbours'* when comparing the peaceability of Fiji to the disorder and frequent warfare in countries such as Papua New Guinea (a frequent comparison). This explicit connection between borders, cultivation, and peace was one similarly shared by early colonialists, who *read* the historical landscape as *divisive* - bearing the marks of social division - in contrast to uniform landscapes amenable to intensive agriculture:

> *'evidences of this [war] remain in the great number of fighting ditches which are anathema to the cultivator, the regularity of whose fields is broken by these scars and records of stormy times.'*[211]

In colonial-era commentaries on the landscape, *unevenness* left by historical warfare is maligned as disturbances to the regularity of cultivated land. Landmarks in this sense fail to fade away and continue to act as divisions in the land which hinder agriculture, explicitly connecting cultivation with peace and its opposite with warfare. The 'boundary script', then, is reflected as the history of the land is read as divisive, war-torn, and uncultivated, in contrast to the ideals of 'regularity' of fields. In the above examples, then, I have tried to contrast indigenous conceptions of forgetting (of history and of the land as entwined) with those views which reflect the 'boundary script' of *inevitable* delineated and cultivated land. In the following sections, I will remain on the borderlands between overlapping conceptions of use/non-use and owned/communal land ownership. In so doing, I will draw on deep temporalities to explore the claims to land that challenge the *presumed inevitability* of the 'boundary script' and reflect commitments to remembrance of other possible relations. In such a setting, *moral trespass* becomes but one act of resisting an uneven landscape of tenure and of reinstating a submerged relationality of indeterminacy, allowing borders to variously form, hold, and dissolve, accordingly.

[211] Ross, 1910, p.44.

Interlude / kove memories / futures

A few straggler bushes of coffee (kove) remain at Naiyalayala, perched on a steep incline, red cherries poking out as a reminder of the coffee plantation that used to stretch from the coast to the cloud forest habitat of Des Voeux peak. In the past, during school trips, kids visited the processing shed to tour the machinery; de-huskers, water pumps, drying racks, and large sacks of green, ready-to-be-roasted beans. Many of the men and women in Tavuki worked at one point or another for the company, kids running between the rows of bushes as their mothers picked the cherries, it wasn't until a few lovers were caught in the fields that the men were prescribed work only in the processing plant.

A post on Facebook by 'Coffee Farms Fiji' at the start of May is asking for red cherries of the Liberica variety, specifically highlighting the benefits and ease of access to this field of agriculture to 'women network farmers', youth, and cooperatives.

'This rare and distinctive coffee variety, known for its exceptional cup quality, is making a comeback in the international coffee scene after years of being overlooked', writes Aiaz Hamid, owner of Coffee Farms Fiji in the Fiji Times.[212]

Coffee has long been grown in Fiji; in bygone eras as provincial 'tax crops' that were payable per family in suitable regions, or in the plantations of many settlers who planted it as part of their many crop experiments, especially in the aftermath of the fall of cotton in the 1870s.[213] *The original coffee seeds to come to Fiji, shipped from Tonga, soon made their way to Taveuni, with J.G. Mason's Alpha plantation having over two-hundred acres in cultivation by the end of the 1870s, with 237 labourers, many of whom were likely 'blackbirded' from other islands in Melanesia. Disease (the fungus Hemileia vastatrix) eventually killed off Fiji's early coffee industry.*

A few decades later, the Bordeaux mixture (a combination of copper sulphate and quicklime) was used as fungicide and the disease was no longer prevalent. However, colonial records show that keeping coffee production going remained a persistent challenge, with an 'old plantation' in Taveuni providing much of the local market with Liberica in the 1940s. Soon, however, this supply too dwindled on account of labour shortages, as workers opted to return to copra work and the war dissolved markets.[214] *Additionally, a sample of Liberica sent in 1951 to Australia was said to have been 'reported upon as unsuitable' and not of the same quality of Arabica. Indeed, the*

[212] Hamid, 2023.
[213] Stokes, 1969, pp.387-389.
[214] NAF, F2/194/3.

Governor of the time viewed coffee not as a viable industry, but rather an 'orchard crop' for villages, which would, at most, supply the local market.[215]

This is no longer the view; with Liberian cherries highly sought after in the 'third-wave' coffee world. Indeed, the harvesting of wild coffee cherries in Taveuni sparks off a small industry in June-August as predominantly iTaukei women and children fill bags to sell, responding to the Facebook post above. It is 'pocket money' for the women and kids, Priya, the buyer, says. If people try to bargain, she tells them forthright that if she doesn't buy them, no one will. She notes, frustratedly, that there has been a decline in yield on account of unpredictable weather; too much rain, wind, and black ants which eat the plant at the flowering stage. In her ¾ acre in the past she could harvest 700-800kg, but now it only yields 100-200kg; thus, she put the advert on Facebook for more cherries, to which people responded in kind: 'Now you are buying, trees are not bearing!'

Coffee has always been marginal to the economy of Fiji, yet Hamid's article in the Fiji Times draws on the longevity – even if sporadic and non-contiguous across the islands – of its presence in Fiji. He speaks of cultural heritage: 'reviving a rare delicacy' and the 'rich history of coffee in Fiji'. But this heritage has always been of an outsider looking in, a remnant of economic relations that long disregarded indigenous development. Now similarly marginalised, these forgotten bushes are re-ascribed with latent potential, a heritage assumed.

Everyday border crossing: case study of Naiyalayala

The land of Naiyalayala (literally, *the boundary*, or as an elder of Vuna said: 'the end right here, where the Tongans were defeated…the end of everything'), constitutes what is the old border between Vuna and Lekutu polities, a 649-acre strip of land in the central west of the island which has, since 1998, been owned by the Taveuni Multi-Racial Probationary Land Purchase Co-Operative Society Ltd. The co-operative bought the land for the sum of $750,000FJD from Carpenters Ltd, who – it was suggested to me in an archetypal story of the land grab period – bought it from the Tui Cakau in 1925 'for one bottle of whisky'. The co-operative has, since taking ownership, subdivided the land into forty commercial plots in the lower portion, fifty residential plots in the middle section, and one-hundred agricultural plots at the highest reaches of the land, towards Des Voeux peak. The co-operative is formed by the landowners of these plots, with each plot equating to one member, with minimal levy fees payable

[215] NAF, F2/194/3.

annually for services such as road maintenance and water access ($160FJD/year, though the co-op is in arrears due to frequent non-payment).

Previously, Carpenters Ltd had planted the land with coffee and built a processing plant for de-husking and drying the beans. The Australian-owned conglomerate owned three other coffee plantations in Taveuni: Nalele (leasehold land used as a plant nursery), Naqara (leasehold plot with small patches of coffee), and Burotu (freehold land, the biggest plantation). Despite fertile soils, however, the extensive planting of robusta coffee was a fatal misstep (only in Burotu was planted the more profitable arabica strain: *caturra*) and the company had lost money for the entirety of the 1970s and most of the 1980s until the instigation of inter-cropping coffee with yaqona, which eventually led to profitable margins. Despite being 'green gold', however, the company 'pulled the pin because it was a cash crop'. Ostensibly the Suva offices pointed to theft as a major factor preventing them from investing further in the business. However, a previous manager of the estate claimed it was more than likely that the losses in the estate were being used as a tax write-off, and the company's desire to make the plantation work was minimal: 'they just wanted to milk money out of copra' (Simi). When the decision was finally made to end the coffee operation, they reportedly offered to sell the estates to the government but received no interest. Instead, the land would be sold to the present co-operative, under the land title 'Native Grant'.

> *Fieldnotes, Naiyalayala, 24th May 2024*
>
> *From the coastal road up, I pass a series of Oregon timber houses, formerly known as 'the lane', these houses made up the staff quarters in Carpenters' time. The large water hole, which was pumped to wash the coffee, is now a swimming pool. When I enter the former processing plant a man is upset as he can't get any signal, opting to go down the hill to find some he mutters as he departs: 'it's not cooperating'. Josh, the manager, shows me a series of documents, one an A3 copy of a land title to a residential plot, yet to be delivered to the recipient who is still to pay the totality of the legal fees and survey costs. He points to the blackboard behind me where a large map of the land is drawn with chalk, lines dividing it into numbered plots, the majority of which is shaded in, denoting its status as sold.*
>
> *'Along the way we had some illegal farmers', Josh says, a term I had only heard once before when discussing the land with another interlocutor, who had been hired by the co-operative a few years prior to spray the perimeter of the lands with herbicide, making clear the delineation that had before been but latent in land law.*

'Our neighbours were thinking it's their land; you know, there's a mentality of Fijians that, you know, they own everything, especially the land. And they used to farm some of the vacant lots that we had and we had to go to court, and finally they are off… there were like twenty farms in there, at that time the grog price was soaring high – this was after Winston – they might have 40-50 grand out of each farm, when they were moving out.

We took them to court, the NLC[216] got involved – the government have their surveyors and they surveyed the whole boundary again and we were in the right, 'cos we have the titles and we were showing them the titles, the plans and everything, and they were showing something – way, much older, 1901, 1900s, they had a plan that they owned a portion of this side…

Very early [pause] after that, you know, how many people had - changed lands, and if something had happened, it wasn't us, it was Carpenters. They were thinking it should be reverted back to them after Carpenters had left, it should go back to them… I really don't know what happened at that time, the old board…

[…]

The grant means it was given – granted – to Carpenters, whether they bought it or what – I don't know. So, that's one of the things they were pointing at when they were arguing with us over the illegal farming. They say: oh it was a grant, it should have been given back when the job is done, it has to revert back. But the government didn't think so.'

When borders are challenged, as in the case of 'illegal farmers', the settled becomes unsettled, giving prospective momentum to contesting claims to land rights. The in/visible border is, once again, re-inscribed with multiplicity and flow, between past and present, non-use and use, and private and communal lands. The tools of legitimation; government survey, deeds of title, made manifest in the land as the agrochemical sprayed outline of a border; negate the jural possibility of co-existing claims to land. However, ownership as a category comprising of legal and moral quality, means different things to different people; with enduring racialised distinctions made clear by interlocutors. Ownership and appropriation, as Strang and Busse (2011, p.4) write in their edited volume: *'[are] ongoing processes of symbolic communication and negotiation'*. The symbolic system, comprised of mutually intelligible symbols and an assumed audience, in which farmers encroached on freehold lands made them categorically 'illegal farmers', underlying which are common law understandings of possession-

[216] NLC was the term used by Josh, meaning Native Lands Commission. This statutory body is presently called the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission (TLFC), being responsible for adjudicating disputes related to land ownership, fishing rights, registration in the Vola ni Kawa Bula (Native Land Register) and customary chiefly positions.

occupation as the basis of land rights (to labour on land you must first possess it). As Rose (1985) wrote in her essay 'Possession as the Origin of Property', to claim property relations in common law one must undertake 'acts of possession' that are, in a sense, a 'text'. Her thesis centralises the import of communicating intent (a 'clear-act' principle) as the basis for property relations, comprising elements of both Locke's labour theory (ownership deriving from use, cultivation, modification) and consent theory (ownership deriving from consent from the relevant stakeholders).[217] However, it gives primacy to clear acts of possession (occupancy) as the foundation of rights to ownership:

> 'This may be a reward to useful labour, but it is more precisely the articulation of a specific vocabulary within a structure of symbols approved and understood by a commercial people.'[218]

The symbolic structure of Fijian land law, then, does not merely make the labour of these farmers *illegible* (therein producing indeterminacies) but rather it creates a new category, of illegality. The way this illegality is reflected upon, however, shines a light on the divergent readings of this 'text'. Many commented that the original agreement was thought to be a 'lease' in which the land would revert back to the people of Tavuki eventually, and note that – in keeping with the *strangeness* of the situation (see Chapter 1 and above) – the Tui Cakau was said to have accepted in exchange six-hundred pounds, and gave the Tui Tavuki 'about one shilling'. These factors make the notion of illegality a contested one which, whilst jurally *concluded* in favour of the cooperative, continues to be read by many in the village as a part of a symbolic structure that continues to dispossess *unjustly*.

Further, the divergent symbolic structure of the Naiyalayala land is not composed of two neatly oppositional ideal types, but rather a fluid responsivity to context which requires ethnographic detail. Timoci frequently crosses the invisible border between a freehold plot in Naiyalayala (in which he works as a 'caretaker' for a local man who lives in New Zealand) and his adjacent *mataqali* land, in which he has a farmhouse (*vale-ni-teitei*), watercress streams, yaqona and taro patches. One day, he was visited by the Ministry of Forestry, whom he had been supplying native tree pot plants, and was debating with his wife about how they should proceed with this work and their longer-term project of constructing an irrigated terrace system to extend his watercress production, for which he was known throughout the island; hopeful shouts of '*karesi*?' following him everywhere. They decide that the watercress project will take place on *mataqali* land, but that his native tree-planting work, in which he will receive a yearly stipend, should be on freehold land. He is concerned that it will incite '*jealousy*'

[217] As explored in the introduction and previous chapter, the adjudications of the Land Claims Commission (LCC) largely applied Locke's labour theory as evidence of rightful claim, the issue of consent being largely absent from discussions due to a perceived lack of a shared symbolic structure.
[218] Rose, 1985, p.88.

and has up to this point: '*moved quietly'*. The desire to evade attention is, tellingly, contrary to the desire of the Ministry to attain widespread community involvement, which a staff member says is integral if Timoci's project will be successful.

The next day, Timoci speaks on the phone with George in New Zealand and is told he can plant the native trees on his land in Naiyalayala. Whilst it is not Timoci and his wife's own land, they are happier to plant the trees in 'Uncle George's' land, rather than on *mataqali* land, where the large greenhouse will be. Instead of offering an image of 'immemorial' connection to particular plots of land, this dynamic interplay of agency, tenure, and sociality, illuminate the ways strict borders – between 'traditional' and 'private' lands – are blurred.[219] In turn, some freehold lands become partially *traditionalised* through kinship ties, and some *mataqali* land become partly *privatised* through projects, such as the construction of a walled greenhouse for his pot plants, which foreground individual agency; containing, excluding, and enclosing. Where Timoci was clear he wanted to plant the native trees on freehold land, his reasons were in large part the fear of social repercussions (i.e. jealousy); highlighting that the distinct socialities that borders suggest are well understood and manoeuvred, but in ways that complicate easy readings of what is deemed 'individualistic' and 'communal'. These conceptual movements between land tenure types, then, can produce ambivalent transactions, of *'gifts which are not really gifts or sales which are not really sales'*.[220] Indeed, I suggest it is these everyday border crossings which invite scrutiny of - and inversely blur - conceptual worlds of ownership and appropriation. The result is, as I have tried to show, that Joseph – in walking past the 'No Trespassing' sign - is both *trespassing* and *not really trespassing*, both frames being conceptually entwined within a mosaic of social landscapes. Taking the position of the border, then, is to 'queer(y)' the neat delineations that they suggest, finding here the zones of interaction between symbolic structures. The result is a dynamic spatio-temporal construction which is responsive, rather than merely principled, and is reflective of porous social orders that do not stay within their bounds but rather are persistently trespassing.

Four generations later: intergenerational returns

'Good fences make good neighbours,' Luke repeats, from his office in Wainiyaku, a large cattle and coconut estate. I can see out of the back window the remnants of the old sugar mill, a large metallic structure, rusted. He has over one-thousand cattle which graze the estate, meandering between

[219] Routledge, 1985, p.30.
[220] Filer and Lowe, 2011, p.167.

seemingly endless rows of Fiji tall coconut trees. The famous story that his ancestors bought the land through a variously interpreted unequal or immoral exchange was one he frequently heard:

> *Luke: 'It's very famous, Fijians saying the land was sold for muskets. It's very possible. Because back in those days – tribalism – because of tribalism you needed that advantage… I mean, how far back do you want to go? Before the Fijians there were the Lapita […] And who was before them? How far back do you want to go?*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *At one stage the family owned about 10,000 acres, and then the family grows, some of the family members go bankrupt. The road you walk down that has been bought out by Indian smallholder farmers. Ah, it's the cycle of the world, you know people think I own this, I own that, you know, yeah you own it now, what happens after you die? It could be yours; it could be hers, it could be the government, who knows? Nothing is certain, you know what I'm saying?'*[221]

Luke's ancestor, Augustus Rood was the brother of James Valentine Tarte (the J.V. Tarte quoted in Chapter 1), who left from Birmingham to Australia on account of Jewish persecution and as part of the gold rush. After having been cheated by a business partner in Australia, he arrived in Taveuni in 1868 and began to buy lands from early settlers who 'couldn't hack it out here'. Once he had purchased many contiguous lands, including Holmhurst, Vuna estates, and Ardmore, J.V. Tarte gave the land the sole name: Wainiyaku, which is the name of one *mataqali* in Vuna. Daryl Tarte (2014) hypothesised that this was Tarte's surreptitious attempt to alleviate some of the risk that villagers would seek to recuperate their alienated lands. Luke, less cynically, says it was done to 'restore that history… the Fijian name that was here before the European settlers came'.

In a plot of land in Delaivuna, about a half a mile up Salialevu Road, I often see Luke driving to-and-fro from the construction of an impressively large new church for 7th Day Adventists. He tells me it was

[221] Land Claim Commission (LCC) documents held at the National Archives Fiji (NAF) often fail to throw much light on this as applications for Crown Grants that I reviewed were in the majority of cases relatively obscure on the conditions of primary purchase: the Section 3 *'That due considerations, to wit ___ was given to the native possessors of the said lands for the purchase thereof by your petitioner (or by the original purchaser as the case may be)'*, often filled out briefly, for example: 'Not Known'. In one claim by J. Wooles for 'Vuna Point', he writes in this section: *'Beddoes, the original purchaser, considerations not known'* (LCC, Report 105). Many lands were sold several times proceeding the initial rapid land sales to first settlers (from 1863 onwards). As one example, the 500 acres of Vuna land known as Holmhurst (where I meet Luke) was originally sold to Oliver Brown on 14th May 1863, and was sold on a further three times in the space of just over four years, before being bought by Reverend William Moore, who applied for a Crown Grant for this, and other lands including Vuna Estate and Ura Estate, during the first LCC in 1875, at which point the 'due considerations' were 'Not Known' (LCC, Report 14).

only after his father died, a few years prior, that he began to go to church, and received his calling. Luke's reasons that building his church is an act of inter-generational reciprocity which forms part of his family's trajectory back to the Church: 'God visits us in the third and fourth generations, meaning at a time when we have forgotten him'. Whilst he said others thought him 'mad' for building such a large church, he was compelled to do it after being 'carried up' one day and reprimanded for his disobedience. The logic of reciprocity (as described in the previous chapter) is pervasive in indigenous Fijian culture, its inter-generational extension allowing '*kalouca'* (bad luck) to be passed on, which Ryle (2010, p.74) has explored in the entwinement of traditional belief and Pentecostal doctrines on reconciliation: 'the sins of our forefathers will be punished to the third and fourth generations'. Socio-spiritual reconciliation within and across generations is understood as essential to ensuring harmonious relations with both people and land: peace (reciprocity) and fertility (prosperity) being entwined. The 'return' framing that Luke provides, is one in which his actions are in response to an inter-generational *promise*. Where reciprocity is either maligned or forgotten, there can be no prosperity. For example, the bad luck (*kalouca)* that befell the Tui Cakau in his forgetting the promise made in the historical *qusi-ni-loaloa* ceremony. These balances are Christianised in Luke's telling; the building of the church becomes his act of reconciliation, a response to 'forgetting', 'ignoring', or more severely, 'disobeying'.

Where an inter-generational framing provoked a sense of injustice – as many of my interlocutors spoke of, referencing large estates such as Wainiyaku – Luke was quick to draw on notions of impermanence regarding land ownership, balancing determinacy with a temporally-infused cynicism: 'it's the cycle of the world, you know people think I own this, I own that, you know, yeah you own it *now'*. Further rhetorically distancing from the notion of historical injustice, he framed his family's coming to Fiji as one of running away – persecution – rather than towards – accumulation - an image that contrasts quite starkly with contemporaneous depictions of the early Tartes (the Cyclopedia of Fiji in 1907 described how they brought cattle from New Zealand, raised horses, were prospering in the copra business, and had built steal rail lines with portable trams).[222]

Luke was haunted by his inciting vision of the Lord's return, where he saw in people:

> 'All their sins and all their mistakes, simple things like buying a house and not giving the church a little bit of money, or giving a little bit back to the poor, or taking a bit to the orphanages; you know, the guilt. The guilt we have now, multiply that by a thousand times!'

[222] Cyclopedia of Fiji, 1907, pp.290-91.

Cultivating memory of the promises made, then, variously enacted by the building of his church, or in the case of *qusi-ni-loaloa*, the re-telling of promises and re-ascription of lands, becomes a corrective to *forgetting* and the guilt, bad luck, and visions of damnation therein. This focus on *giving* (or re-giving, as it may be) as method of remembrance becomes of utmost importance when conceptual worlds of reciprocal exchange increasingly put strains on individuals who struggle with the basic costs of living. Wilful acts of forgetting (or *not* reciprocating in kind), become ways to negotiate tensions between individual needs and customary expectations that put a strain on the individual. However, as will become clear in the following section, self-conscious awareness of switching between the symbolic structures of exchange types is not without its felt sense of internal ambiguity, or at its worst, conflict.

Interlude / old borders

29th May 2024

'My chant must go on [Noqu vucu sa na cici sobu mada]

Breaking through barriers [Saqa voroka na i yalayala]

Perhaps that is Vatu Tabataba [Oqori beka a Vatu Tabataba]

Colliding with rock it shattered [Saqata na vatu a sa na tasere]

Dulu-a-sogo-meke is my name [Na yacaqu o Dulu-a-sogo-meke]

Floating, floating, floating, floating. [Ciri a nawa, ciri a nawa, nawa, nawa]'[223]

I am searching for Vatu Tabataba, the 'old border' between Vuna and Tavuki, said to be a boulder at the cliff's face, some twenty-feet high, with the visible trace of a warrior's handprints.[224] *The mark was, as the Tui Tavuki told me: 'like a barrier for the enemies when they come by canoe; that they were there'. They face outwards, towards the sea, a sign for those who come from outside that this land is peopled and defended. Archaeologists have commented on the sparseness of rock art in Fiji as evidence not of its lack of social significance, but rather its inverse:*

[223] Good, 1978, pp.271-2. Note: This was a recorded *meke* '*Tiko voli mai na koro ko Soso*' (I was at Soso village), recorded in Navakawau in October 1966, the *meke* having been composed in 1954.

[224] There are two Vatu Tabatabas in Taveuni, the other being on the coast adjacent to the village of Navakawau, a series of nine handprints that are the testament of the warrior-chief Lalavata, who fought the Vuna people; the marks said to be made by the blood of his people seeping out of the rocks. This was likely the Vatu Tabataba referenced in the *meke* above.

'its making in Fiji should correspond to a particular time period in which the necessity for a social construction of the landscape is most pronounced'.[225]

The visibility of this 'border' is, thus, indicative of a particular moment which called for the landscape to be defined, a sign to outsiders. Today, however, the border is hard to find; not many people have seen it nor know much about it. My interest in this topic invites some curiosity but also bafflement. In the car with an Indo-Fijian taxi driver, he laughs when I tell him my plan: 'You're like one old man', he says.

As we descend on a bumpy road through thick bush, we finally arrive at Levusomo, a part of Vuna land that is hidden from the main road, nestled next to the sea. We walk to the site of the old border, the son of the homeowner, Sepo, guides me down to the shore, and we stand in the low tide with our backs to the sea as he points to where the handprints used to be. Large boulder stones remain, trees overhanging, but no marks (see Figure 5).

The last time Sepo saw the handprints was around 1999, when a new road was built, lower down near the shore, and wider for the growing number of trucks passing daily for the burgeoning taro industry. In the process of construction, the rock was destroyed and ended up in the sea. Later, in 2016, Cyclone Winstone destroyed the 'new road', now heavily overgrown with brush and petering out after Sepo's house. The 'old road' remains, and we return to it, driving home, past the border of old polities; invisible, destroyed, submerged.

Figure 5. Photograph of the site of Vatu Tabataba, no longer visible, near to Ura estate in Vuna district.

[225] Berrocal and Millerstrom, 2013, p.162.

From boundaries to transgressions

I have drawn on the discursive and material aspects of the 'border' to ask questions with deep temporalities on a seemingly simple topic: property. The issue of property in Taveuni was, at the time of my fieldwork, not only an issue that delved into histories of land alienation, rights, and future use, but also invited questions of more everyday dispossession; the stealing of a mobile phone from inside an interlocutor's house, for example, could incite a critique of the youth today. These more mundane transgressions move talk of 'borders' into the wider realm of ownership and property relations, one in which cultural critique was a frequent response: the refrain that kinship relations had been replaced by property relations summarised in one interlocutor's words: 'blood is not important anymore, money is important'. Herzfeld (1985), in his ethnography of Cretan shepherds, showed how the raiding of another's sheep created, rather than negated, alliances between the thief and victim; the benefits to each coming from their future mutual aid. For the theft to be beneficial, however, it must be against someone outside of the thief's social circle; neither kin nor affine, to establish connections far and wide.[226] In contrast, as I will explore in this chapter, everyday thefts in Taveuni frequently reference *existing* social and kin-based expectations, deriving their moral ambiguity from the *proximity* of thief and victim.

Whilst critiques of stealing are manifold amongst farmers, I will focus on the conceptual world in which stealing is comprised and comprises. To do this I follow a historical trajectory of interrelated concepts of indigenous dispossession, not to suggest a sense of chronological evolution, but rather to theorise on the ways in which concepts, such as stealing, are given an *essence* through *feeling* – indignity, wrongfulness, injury. By framing conceptual worlds with the spatialised rhetoric of borders, stealing – as one concept bordering others – can be interrogated from the borderlands; where overlaps, critique, and, as ethnographic data will elucidate, the resulting internal tensions when these concepts refuse to entirely stay within their boundaries, which is made manifest in a crisis of *feeling*. When thefts were openly discussed, these frequently elided accusations with a wider criticism of the social disintegration that thefts suggest (as well as criticisms of police efforts to catch thieves). In this way, the unbounded aspect of stealing is contained, even internalised, to avoid further inter-personal conflict, gossip or, indeed, the possibility of recrimination.

Questions of definition, for example, what is the *essence* of: lending, borrowing, sharing, stealing, are more aptly investigated by seeing how far these concepts are stretched by interlocutors. Indeed, as resulting feelings regarding different modes of exchange are fluid, so too are the concepts which are comprised of these feelings. To further this point, I want to borrow/steal from Strathern (2011) and

[226] Herzfeld, 1985, pp.163-205.

suggest that in some cases in Taveuni, property exchange could be *kerekere'ing*, borrowing, and stealing, *simultaneously*. Whilst simultaneity assumes synchronicity, an exchange's quality may indeed change over time, an obvious example being a 'loan' to an acquaintance that does not get repaid nor is pressed, thus becoming akin to gifting, or in its negative aspect: a slow-burn theft. To elucidate this point further I will turn to a brief history of property acquisition in the iTaukei context, and how it relates to ideals of communalism and individualism. First, I will discuss the *vasu* system and then move on to the *kerekere* system, before concluding with an ethnographic focus on stealing.

In analyses of the political economy of pre-colonial Fiji, the Fijian relation of *vasu* has been recognised as enabling socially acceptable forms of dispossession that have enabled powerful confederations (*matanitu*) to form and sustain.[227] Indeed, the relation of the sister's son to the property of his uncle is a large part of the historical socio-political manoeuvring of chiefly elites, 'sons of the land' have the right to appropriate wealth from their mother's land such as mats, canoes, pigs, and in this way can fundamentally undermine political structures based on resource accumulation. Where the *mataqali*, being a patrilineal descent grouping, dictates that land is passed down paternally (although this can be otherwise in special circumstances, such as if the father is not written in the *Vola ni Kawa Bula*) it is the *vasu* relationship which renders property – and thus power – relations dynamic. Inoke, a *vasu* of Tavuki, explains how the position is fundamental to the Fijian village, but how it can inversely undermine the power structure; whilst others in the village (the *Kai Tavuki* - people of Tavuki on the paternal line) have to obey the rules – no wearing of hats, no shouting across houses, no eating whilst walking between houses – Inoke can do as he pleases, which he sometimes does: 'to show myself'. He points to a statue of the Virgin Mary in the green outside of his house; no one else can build a house in front of the statue, but he can.[228] Inoke in the same breath says that 'we are only vasu to the king, anything I borrow is from the king… he has to give it, to show he is a good leader', then soon after: that as he is *vasu* of his sister's kids anything they ask for; 'I can't refuse'. As he is *vasu* of Tavuki, he has 'authority and power' to ask Kai Tavuki for resources. He pauses: 'you will know it it's too much'. When in battle, the vasu will die first: 'because they love their *momos* (uncles)'.[229]

These allowances extend to the possession (though not *ownership*) of the land's resources, and this was a key method that pre-colonial polities extended their influence. For example, the Tui Cakau Golea

[227] Routledge, 1985. Note: Thomas (1992) cites many historical sources that refer to it as a self-reflexive system of property acquisition of much importance.
[228] Inversely, the responsibility of the *vasu* to the village is also said to be much stronger than that of the relation of the Kai Tavuki to its chief, the *vasu* do not need to wait for the chief's command, as they know inherently what to do: 'When it's time, we act… they give themselves for their mother's land… the vasu have to die first, before the King' (Inoke).
[229] This is not so common in Cakaudrove anymore, Inoke contrasts this with Namosi or Macuata suggesting it is more acceptable in these provinces.

was said to have more than one-hundred wives across many villages, as the resulting kinship ties allowed the Ai Sokula, and particularly the paramount chief, access to 'the wealth of the mother's land'.[230] This methodology at once extended influence through inter-marriage of chiefs and *maramas* (women of high rank), whilst inversely – as was more likely the case with high-ranking *vasu* in his mother's land - inviting precarity through *vasu* relations that might *take* more than they *give*. As Routledge (1985, p.214) writes:

> *'[T]he nature of the vasu system was such that sooner or later the cross-cutting of obligations would begin to be of negative effect… [because of] the conflicting interests of chiefly sons with different vasu relationships through their respective mothers.'*

The risks 'sons of the land' posed to socio-political relations meant that in the case of high-power families, attendants might be sent with their *maramas* to their husband's land, who was skilled in procuring abortions, with some mothers being required to kill their male children, whose allegiance would lie with their father's people.[231] The pertinent point to make is that to '*vasuta'* property was an acceptable form of acquisition that was used to powerful effect; chiefly influence deriving not from control of land, but rather of the control of resources through kinship relations. This underlying structure of latent and actuated property distribution meant that dynamism was maintained within the system, with no chiefdom able to convert influence into permanent power due to cross-cutting kinship obligations. The import of kin sociality as method of property acquisition, and its connection to 'stealing', will become apparent in the final section.

To move to a discussion of *kerekere*, I will first state clearly that I do not claim that *kerekere* is akin to stealing. The historical sources do, however, suggest an evolution in its form as everyday practice into an 'emblematic custom' of Fijian society, one which invites reification and internal critique in equal measure. In its ideal form, *kerekere*, as kin-based reciprocal giving is considered integral to the moral order of the *vanua*, as those who are in need of something vocalise this need, to be met by others who both have what is needed and would not be put into resulting hardship by giving it away.

Kerekere, of course, also does its work in relation to other concepts. This central notion was the site of debate between Thomas (1992a, 1992b, 1993) and Sahlins (1993a, 1993b), with the former positing the colonial encounter as 'objectifying' the everyday practice of *kerekere*, citing colonial attempts to temper the practice with the stated aim of advancing individualism. In his rationale, the ability to promote or reject a custom requires first its objectification, which comes to be emblematic of a

[230] Sayes, 1982, pp.116.
[231] Ibid., pp.115-120.

particular form of sociality; in this case, communalism.[232] Sahlins, contrarily, derides the idea that colonial oppositionality forged the practice; citing many historical sources that depict its form (whilst often spuriously and ethno-centrically glossed as '*begging'*) in pre-colonial times and pre-missionary times, arguing that this evidence of continuity of 'a self-consciously Fijian custom' makes Thomas' claims of objectification incorrect.[233] Rather than Sahlins' dismissal of the colonial encounter, I argue that to disregard the colonial encounter is to disregard, following Strathern, how concepts do their work in relation to other concepts (indeed, dialectical oppositionality play a central role in sense-making during times of change, as this thesis highlights). This point – as Thomas was want to clarify – is not to say *kerekere* has not long existed, perhaps into the deeply unknowable past, but it is to give credence to the notion that contrasting forces add weight to conceptual worlds, in which *kerekere* becomes emblematic of the wider Fijian social and moral landscape, and offers a critique of this *other* world as one of relative *unfeeling*.[234]

Where these long-standing internal critiques of *kerekere* intersect with the regularised frame of 'stealing', in Taveuni, then, allowed for rhetorical slippage of moral critique into conceptual worlds which had, until then, been largely delimited from the notion of injury.[235] Stealing as one concept amongst others has, I argue, made public scrutiny of both the positive and the negative aspects of *kerekere* more prevalent, with varied readings of this practice being employed in projects of self-definition. This dualistic appraisal can be of both positive aspect (Lissy: 'That's the one good thing about us, we give. We ask, we don't feel ashamed to ask'), and negative aspect (a farmer talking to a staff member at the Ministry of Agriculture: 'this is sometimes what pushes farmers away, because the one on the other side thinks we want to *kerekere* like that'). On the one hand it is a positive communal resource, though Lissy's use of the word 'shameful' should suggest the sense that its negative aspect, of anti-individualism, is always not too far away. This usage reflects Williksen-Bakker's (2002, p.79, 2004, p.211) tracing of the evolution of *madua* (shame, or a burdensome feeling of stress about things variously done or left undone, such as socio-cultural obligations), wherein during the immediate post-colonial period invocations drew on the *shameful* nature of business for iTaukei people, later uses inverted the value of traditional modes of being in relation to modernity. Indeed, the self-awareness of the second quote similarly makes clear *kerekere* and self-identity are frequently aligned in a critical

[232] Thomas, 1992b, p.215.
[233] Sahlins, 1993a, p.851.
[234] The moral high ground of early missionaries was challenged by chiefs that viewed their propensity to buy/sell rather *un*-loving (see Sahlins, 1993a, 1993b, pp.5-6).
[235] Historical sources suggest the evolution of this sense of transgressive quality may be linked to the Fijian-Christian notion of *vakaloloma* (love), as where in the past people would only *kerekere* from their family and chiefs, now all were 'brothers under Christ' so it became more common to *kerekere* more widely, inviting negative responses (see France, 1966, p.283-4).

mode, as the fear of being seen to 'want to *kerekere*' may inhibit people from asking for help, even from government ministries.[236]

A few weeks after some men from the north of the island were caught by police unloading stolen yaqona on the shores of Vanua Levu which had been taken from Salialevu estate, Jale moves on from telling me the news, explaining his annoyance that when he was at work at the nearby dive shop people regularly took things that were around the outside of his house; firewood and fruits from his trees. If they asked, he says, it would be okay; but he has limits, he won't let people use his brush-cutter anymore, or his washing machine, anything that can break. A common response to questions of property is that, if you ask for it you will get it. In turn, the act of asking is imbued with moral reflexivity; after my housemate had not heard back about a bag of taro she had *kerekered* from her brother in the village, she reflected that it may have been improper of her to ask due to the crops being for the market. After some delay, he requested from her a data recharge for his phone (a reciprocal *city gift*).

Jale, however, differentiates himself by his statement that he has spent time in New Zealand, and thus, he says: 'If I don't have sugar, I will have tea without sugar', meaning he won't ask for things. This rejection of the system has both material and symbolic aspects; as in the first, there is Jale's pride that he does not *need* to ask, given he has a well-paid job and is more often than not the requested *of* rather than requester, and this leads to the second, symbolic point; that his belief that *kerekere* will be reciprocated or respectfully engaged is increasingly put at odds with his experience of daily thefts. I hypothesise that in re-ascribing property appropriation with injurious quality (making a *victim*), the traditional framing of *kerekereing* is regularised in everyday usage with a sense of transgression which allows social differentiation between those who ask and those who do not. Pat's fluid discussion of recent thefts and his stance against *kerekereing* highlights the moral framings that increasingly align the two conceptual worlds through the felt sense of transgression and injury. Therefore, responses are sought which adequately respond to requests that increasingly incite internal conflict.

> *Fieldnotes, Wairiki, 15th December 2023*
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> *I am walking up to Narusa later, the ladies at the 'carwash' say I need to eat before I go because they are renowned grog drinkers up there: 'people hide under the bedsheet all day, a black sheet', laughing. 'When it's nighttime, come out' [she mimics a cobo, the clap which initiates kava drinking], more laughter, as we sit on the bench at the back of their house.*

[236] As Williksen-Bakker (2004, p.199-200, p.206) makes clear, however, this cultural aspect of 'shame' is not merely a 'painful' experience, but also a 'reassuring' one, as it is understood as part of iTaukei identity; in the same way as respect, humility, and other synonymous terms. In avoidance relationships, as between same-sex siblings, for example, shame and pride can be said to be acting in unison.

'We are laughing but it's true eh', Ilisipeci assures me. 'They can kerekere everything, not like in your place'.

Fina: 'Funny story, one man comes asks another man for bele, next day same thing, more bele please. Day after that, he asks again and the man cuts the stalks, gives the whole thing to him; eat this and plant it!'

J.S.: 'Is it hard to say no?'

Ilisipeci: 'Yeah, man, very hard.'

Fina: 'Because we feel sorry, eh, they come and ask we want to give it to them. But some people they take advantage.'

Ilisipeci: 'Sometimes we don't give eh, we say we don't have, but we have it, we hide it.'

Fina and Ilisipeci often spoke of the difficulty of running their small business of food parcels when balancing requests; on the one hand, 'feeling sorry' (in the spirit of *vakaloloma*) and on the other; people 'taking advantage' (in the spirit of *transgression*), the internal tension in attempts to reconcile these divergent feelings of *vakaloloma*/transgression being what other scholars of business *vakavanua* a resultant 'crisis of self'.[237] Whilst the dual demands of market economy and traditional custom were more felt in village settings, internal tensions between dual demands on iTaukei were an oft reflected upon topic across all land tenure:

Lusi: 'Staying in the village, the vanua is calling, the government, the church, we have to give something to them, but for us – freehold land – you are boss, on your own… But you know, Fijians, we have the relatives, and we have to care about each other...'[238]

Kerekereing is understood as a valuable social, moral, and central organising force, but the obligation to give and to host is also often referenced in undermining both the educational prospects and economic autonomy of the household. The quasi-guilty expression of Ilisipeci when telling of their need to hide goods tells us much about deeper questions of ownership; the first, is that the asking (*kerekereing*) of goods is increasingly *felt* as 'counterfeit theft'.[239] Indeed, two women I knew from Suva who were successful in business made a point that the main reason was that they had learned to say

[237] Farrelly and Vudiniabola, 2013, p.21.

[238] A *'soli parishi'* (similar to a tithe) is paid by some Catholics in the Holy Cross parish. 'Some people they don't want to pay', Timoci remarks, though he says he contributes at least $150 FJD every year.

[239] Strathern, 2011, p.30. Note: Early writings speak of the linguistic form of request of *kerekere vakaviti* as rhetorically slipping into the notion of the article already being the property of the speaker. For example: 'I am come to beg *my* money, that is that which I need and you possess' (John Hunt, Methodist Missionary Society, 29 June 1839, quoted in Sahlins, 1993a, p.857, *italics* added).

no. Inversely, those who *don't ask* – as in the case of a man who rather built his own makeshift lean-to rather than stay in the house of his wife's parents – are distinguished as exhibiting a modern form of possession: not in things, but rather: 'they show that the quality of a life lived as a proprietor of *the self* defines their being'.[240]

Secondly, the women's need to hide goods is revealing of the extent to which 'private property' in communalist societies unbinds definitions of such bordering concepts as sharing and stealing. As Strathern (2011, p.32) writes of this inversion:

> *'The same concept (private property) […] gave a means of expression to mischief such as thieving and vandalism. If, however, the moment came at which property were to be conceived as theft, we could say it had captured its own shadow.'*

The question of property returns to understandings of *needs* and *surplus* as defined by the central tenet of *kerekere*; that he who gives is not then put in need. Interlocutors hiding property then is an expression of their need (and the perception of disingenuous needs of those who often *kerekere*) which is inclusive of supposed 'surplus', therein *giving* can feel more like being *taken* from. In this way, apparently distinct socialities underlying the conceptual worlds of *kerekereing*/borrowing/stealing increasingly cross over and become the other. In this elision of the common dichotomy of tradition/modernity, *stealing* reveals itself as both a modern concept and a *shadow* of the traditional, a particularity that makes its borders often hard to find, and yet harder for those individuals who attempt to address its impacts. In this context, concealment, evasion, silence, and modification of practices, become methods of negotiation; for example, as one NGO worker told me of *tavales* stealing crops from each other: *'you can't stop it',* so farmers had to plant extra in expectation of theft, hindering prospects for growth. In an alteration to practices; the traditional method of producing '*ota* (fermented coconut): leaving coconut scrapings in a permeable bag tied to a rock at the intertidal zone for four days, has been adapted to putting the scrapings in a bucket of salty water that can be changed out each day or two, and importantly; kept inside the home. The modification was in response to frequent thefts of the bag's contents, likely consumed by hungry nighttime fishermen.[241] In the first example, tradition is reimbued with transgression but negotiated in a way that attempts to balance commercialism and communality, and in the second transgression alters tradition in ways that make it more 'privatised'. Both suggest that the conceptual world of *theft* is a porous one, *leaking out* as well

[240] Sykes, 2007, p.221, *italics* added.

[241] One may hypothesise this could be on account of the relative convenience of this method, though interlocutors suggested it was more in *response* to theft.

as *letting in*, which I will conclude this chapter exploring with reference to the following ethnographic vignette.

> *Fieldnotes, Vuna village, 13th September 2023*
>
> *Tevita points to the 1,200l water tank outside his house, he had applied to the Ministry of Agriculture for a bigger one – he has seven kids, his wife is currently working in Suva, so he is helped around the house by his oldest daughters – the 10,000l tank had arrived but soon after was stolen. He knows by whom, but he doesn't want to say.*
>
> *Tia catches him up on news about his cousin in Suva, he tells her about what is going in the village, he is deferent to her as his elder. He tells her that some of the 'young women' have been seen taking cassava from farms, and he blames the grog; the men are getting lazy, and they don't perform their role as provider, he says. He is a 7th-Day Adventist and abstains from grog, as well as any red meat; though he is famed for his ability to catch coconut crabs, he never eats them himself. They let out a big laugh when they talk of a man who goes around and takes everyone else's crops: 'He's got a big farm, 'cos he has no farm', Tia says. She points her finger to her head, as if to say he must be a bit crazy.*

Tevita's reference to three different kinds of theft in the village reveal the multiple but overlapping ways that theft is theorised and apprehended. The oxymoronic phraseology of having a 'big farm' and 'no farm', simultaneously, is suggestive of the ways in which borders are understood to be conceptually dissolved by stealing, unbinding property therein. There is within Tevita's criticisms a slippage from direct admonition of thieves to causal relations; primely, that of the role of grogging. In all three cases of theft, stealing is taken to be for a *need* not met. The women are *made* to steal because of their husband's failures to provide for them. Indeed, in other instances interlocutors pointed to the site of women at the seafront each morning, cleaning fish for the local Indo-Fijian canteen owner, whilst men 'are on top, but they just grog and sleep'. Whereas everyday small-scale subsistence crop theft is often done by women, such as the pinching of the inner leaves of taro to make *rourou* (taro leaves cooked in coconut milk), the stealing of grog is solely done by men.

Grog's multiplicity of social meaning also applies to theft: it is the perceived cause of increased stealing because of its role in men's decline (*laziness*, in many interlocutors words), and the crop most damaging when stolen (it is a source of *agency*).[242] Indeed, many people refer to their yaqona patch as their 'bank', 'super-attenuation patch', or succinctly: 'with that one thousand, I can go anywhere'. Another interlocutor, a young farmer, remarked of its sense of security: 'no matter if someone steals a

[242] See also Tomlinson, 2007.

hundred dollars, the grog is there'. Similarly, as an internal currency within social life on the island (a two-bag 'passport' to social gatherings, for example), theft's effect on internal agency is also evident.

Theft's capacity to dissolve borders ('he's got a big farm 'cos he has no farm') and conceptual borders (between legal/moral definitions of exchange), permits the 'thief' to be multiple, variously: grog stealing one's energy *and* the stealing of grog, traditionalism and modernity. Thievery being everything and its opposite produces internal conflicts which complicate what can be done about everyday theft. Ilisipeci and Tevita's words above suggest that whilst men 'are on top', the strain of meeting livelihood needs and cultural demands – when men fail to provide – falls doubly hard on women. Lusi posits the separateness of freehold land ownership as allowing her to be her to be her own boss, but this spatial exclusivity does not extricate oneself from customary obligations (funerals, weddings, *kerekere*, etc) that require resources and can thus necessitate even *deeper* immersion in the cash economy. As Luke's apocalyptic visions of those who did not 'give a little' suggests, this turn towards the cash economy can be viewed as engaging further in moral livelihoods, founded in – not superseding – communalist ideals.[243]

The thief remains, however, at large in Taveuni, and continues to provoke internal critique at the borderlands of social orders. Questions remain about what one can do about theft when exactly *what* is being stolen remains an uncertainty. Everyday theft evades easy capture within conceptual worlds, but with increasing calls to target and punish rampant cash crop theft, thievery of all kinds may soon find it harder to stay in the shadows.[244]

<u>Interlude / the scentless flower</u>

> *The elusive red flower of the Tagimoucia (Medinilla waterhousei), the story goes, were borne out of the tears of a young girl who was scolded by her mother, ran away from her home, and became entangled in a large vine overhanging an ivi tree. Another story goes that her tears were the result of two boys who vied for her love, fighting for her hand but both being killed in the process. These teardrop shaped flowers are emblems of the island; as one man put it to me: 'if you've never seen the tagimoucia, you have not been to Taveuni'.*

[243] See Singh-Peterson and Iranacolaivalu (2024, pp.150-151) which supports this thesis in another setting in Fiji where, whilst circles of reciprocity were reduced by individuals to the level of *mataqali*, employment in the cash economy allowed for continuing engagement with customary expectations.
[244] Fiji Times, 2024, Fiji Times, 2025.

But, my friend Joseph is sure of something: the story has been changed. The truth is, rather, that a young couple from Taveuni stole the flower from Futuna. The chief in Futuna saw them doing this, and said to let them go, on one condition; they could not take its scent.

One day, when a tour guide was walking up to Des Voeux peak with a small group from the nearby island of Qamea, he told them that the tagimoucia was just over the hill. A woman spoke up: 'Yeah, I know that; I can smell it'. She was of Futunan descent. The flower may be synonymous with Taveuni now, but its scent remains only for the people of its original home in Futuna.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I have tried to trace notions of dispossession across a vast temporal span, arguing that the everyday occurrence of stealing in Taveuni increasingly invites questions that bridge these deep temporalities. In its framing of injury and punishment, talk of stealing incorporates notions of selfhood, communality, and property, which push at its conceptual borders. As I have shown, these borders are persistently made fluid with neighbouring concepts through people's negotiation of *feeling*. Focusing on internal conflict, I have attempted to connect notions of acquisition/dispossession that may at first appear categorical: sharing, borrowing, requesting, trading, stealing, but when ethnographically interrogated, begin to blur into each other in ways that make for a multiplicity of meanings possible in single exchanges. The multiple social orders that co-exist similarly allow for a topological analysis of portions of land, as at any moment those living in the subdivided landscape surrounding Naiyalayala may see the land as part of the ancient Tavuki land, as a memory of childhoods or youth spent working in the large plantation, as the remnants of colonial-era spatiality, or as nature reserve, cooperative land, or belonging to foreigners.

The central thesis of multiplicity is connected to how this chapter started; a single event of border crossing, walking past a 'No Trespassing' sign that attempts to divide pure categories of public/private lands. It evolved to discuss how 'illegal farmers' are made in land law, and how historical interpretation and epistemological inequalities enact themselves in boundary-making. Whether dual claims to land can ever be reconciled in the case of Naiyalayala (where divergent understandings of 'granting' land remain foundational), the focus of this chapter has been on the ways in which people negotiate feelings of injury – over present-day theft, being taken advantage of, or as a cause of century-old land sales – in mundane ways that are suggestive of underlying tensions. In the specific context of Taveuni's alienated landscape, histories of dispossession possess the island in ways that shape subjectivities and,

therein, make theft both a new everyday category and one that reaches back into deeper histories of exchange deemed unjust, injurious, and indeterminate.

Whilst Strathern (2011) states that each form of exchange has its own distinct sociality, it is clear from my interlocutors' words that stealing both *lets in* other socialities - thus complicating its vilification - and *leaks out* its own anti-sociality - making the maintenance of conceptual distinctions a persistent problem. As I have shown, when interlocutors speak of stealing, they often also speak of other causative, social factors, which frequently dissolve its conceptual borders, rendering porous conflicting notions of ownership, selfhood, and responsibility. In turn, theft is made neither entirely continuous with nor entirely ruptured from earlier forms of traditional exchange but rather acts structurally to complicate distinctions between individualism and communalism; with the thief being seen as both the ultimate individualist and as the most intimate of communalists. In turn, interlocutors frequently balance outright vilification with cultural contingencies, the ratio of each being reflexively a part of liberalist identity formation. In the following chapter, these conflicts will take root in the specific context of the taro market economy, where conceptual borders of exchange – traditional and modern - are negotiated, with the figure of the middleman inciting – and indeed: *consuming* – conflicted feelings comprised within regularised market exchange.

Chapter 3

'The middleman is eating us': hope, suspicion, and race in the taro market economy

The economy of Taveuni is built on strata; the household subsistence sub-economy (both iTaukei and Indo-Fijians), the ceremonial sub-economy (iTaukei within villages, requiring surplus foods and yaqona for *vanua* obligations), and the market sub-economy (both iTaukei and Indo-Fijians involved in taro and kava selling). To understand the economy of Taveuni, thus, it is necessary to understand racialised differences in socio-economic obligations that have long been a topic of discussion amongst iTaukei themselves, as well as outsiders such as British colonial administrators and foreign merchants. Throughout this chapter, I will focus on the role of the middleman in the Taveuni taro industry as the intermediary between local and global markets and explore how, in their multi-situated positionality, they are instilled with both *hope* and *suspicion* by farmers across the island. Where the previous chapter engaged everyday stealing by farmers to ask questions of conceptual boundaries and deep temporality, this chapter will shift to everyday exchange as sites where the historical socio-economic codification of the 'buyer' is variously enacted and subverted by middlemen (see Figure 6). Whilst their role has historically been that of an outsider (whether European, Chinese, or other), today the export companies on the island are resolutely Fijian. The outsider position had maintained a degree of socio-cultural distinction between middlemen and farmers, as 'the role of the entrepreneur becomes institutionalised as belonging to aliens'.[245] However, this divide no longer holds, and invites a response to Appadurai's (2024, p.100) question: is the middleman/exporter a completely external entity to the moral and cultural values of the community in Taveuni?

To begin I will trace the middleman across colonial history to the present day, to explain how the tensions contained within the role are both old and new. This brief economic history aims to, at once, introduce the central economic activity of the island to explore contemporary commentaries on iTaukei commercial success, and to probe at the ways in which the socio-economic role of the middleman spans a wide temporality, connecting past, present, and imagined future. In the final section I will ethnographically detail three contemporary exporters on the island to probe at the kinds of boundary-spanning work done by these buyers and, in turn, explore the ways in which the export-based, commercial taro industry intersects with persistent questions of historically racialised, often colonially codified, economic identities. In conclusion, I will assess the industry's impact on the reproduction of core cultural values of communities; on the one hand taro brings together islanders around an

[245] Couper, 1968, p.272.

organising economic principle of commercialism, and on the other, persistent suspicion of the opaque nature of markets elicits old fears of peripherality, exploitation, and indigenous decline.

Figure 6. Photographs of buying taro. Left: Taro harvested at the farm. Centre: Rejected taro, either undersized, abnormally shaped, or rotten. Right: Taro driven to a buyer's house.

The reasons for focusing on middlemen are threefold, reflective of three ways the role acts as a *bridge*. Firstly, in keeping with this thesis' interrogation of the past's enduring impact on the present, the organising figure of the middleman offers a vantage point to track historical trends that illuminate a central tension between evolving economic identities and communalism. As Belshaw (1955, p.147) points out:

> *'In their capacity as leaders, entrepreneurs represent and influence directions of social change. Their values and methods are a reflection of the synthesis between old and new that is the developing culture'.*

In turn, tracking the middleman is also to follow the ways in which old and new ideas of exchange intertwine in central and southern Taveuni. Secondly, the relative opaqueness of markets and their role in connecting the island with the rest of the world, and turning *taro* into *money*, makes them objects of both hope *and* suspicion. Indeed, their *mobility* has been drawn on to assert their usefulness as well as cast doubt on their morality.[246] Thirdly, acting like economic connective tissue, middlemen

[246] Thompson, 1971, p.95-96.

coagulate all taro farmers in Taveuni into one group, regardless of ethnicity, offering a vision of latent class-based consciousness that colonial-era demarcations of economic role long denied.

Implicit in Appadurai's question above, is the more fundamental question of how far the economy is embedded within the socio-moral world. Where in the past the market was restricted to a peripheral role (most societies being based on ideals of self-sufficiency), the permeation of its logics into most-if-not-all spheres of society threatens traditional social arrangements.[247] Gudeman (2009) argues that whilst the neocolonial view posits mutuality within market relations as 'imperfections in an ideal model', and new institutional economists ascribe them as part of *homo economicus'* calculations, it is rather the dialectic between embedded/disembedded; community and impersonal trade, which frequently 'mystify each other'.[248] These mystifications reflect the kinds of moral ambiguities attached to theft explored in the previous chapter, whereby purely rationalist analyses fail to apprehend the complex interplay of possessiveness, kinship, and affect. Indeed, they similarly reflect some of my own confusion when my neighbour told me she bought the fish in her food parcels from her husband, who bought it from his father - 'to support his business' - despite the money likely ending up in the same household pool. In this case, as Gudeman suggests, payments can straddle the border between market logic and strengthening of kinship bonds.[249] In another instance, when out buying taro with a middleman, the rain coming down, an older farmer poked his son, whose farm we were collecting from, laughing: 'I told my son; you pay me double time for the rain!' The joke landing because of the understanding that it was very unlikely to be the case, if he was to get 'paid' at all.

Fijian ethnography has frequently highlighted the way in which business acts as a 'mode of reflection' as much as a 'mode of exchange'.[250] Indeed, contradictions are frequently shown to be navigated *through*, not in spite of, dichotomies such as business/*vanua* and money/gift. For instance, Toren (2010, p.149) has shown how money operates in traditional Fijian settings, being morally 'neutral' in explicit commodity exchange, but needing prior 'symbolic laundering' to be made appropriate in ceremonial exchange:

> *'Money becomes problematic only when its exchange threatens to confuse the ideal distinction between commodity and gift and thus call into question existing social relations.'*

Monetary transactions which put *value* on taro, such as the ones that middlemen engage daily in, are not *supposed* to threaten social bonds because they exist on the economic plane disconnected from

[247] Hart and Hann, 2009, p.2.
[248] Gudeman, 2009, pp.17-18, p.29.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Williksen-Bakker, 2002, p.79. See also: Farrelly and Vudiniabola, 2013, Williksen-Bakker, 2004.

social relations. However, due in part to a sense that the cost-of-living on Taveuni had become untenable; with the price of basic staples frequently being the source of much frustration; the middleman, at the coalface of the effect of market economics on an unpredictable buying price, is an obvious target for scapegoating, as the self-conscious anti-sociality of commodity exchange is laid bare. That two-out-of-the-three export businesses were owned by Indo-Fijians only furthered some interlocutors' sense that money was not neutral, morally, as pure commodity exchange would have us believe, but rather indicative of the success of economic-over-relational moralities.

Where in previous chapters I have focused on the enduring questions regarding place (Chapter 1) and property on the island (Chapter 2), this chapter will focus on the way in which the market moves *across* the land, undoing the borders and boundaries of tenure type and ethnic divides that were once part-and-parcel of land's constitution. As Rokolekutu (2007, p.8) states:

> *'Land and race are entwined… Land therefore constitutes the political and economic space in which the two racial groups intersect. Given the intertwinement of land and race, one cannot engage in the land discourse without confronting the discourse on race.'*

The politicisation of land has always been central to the *re*-production of ethnic tensions; wherein different economic models have been applied to different parts of the land. Britton (1980), in their analysis of a country's 'space-economy', asserts that underdevelopment – oft-cited of iTaukei communities – is 'more of a consequence of forces external to a territory than of internal environmental and social characteristics'.[251] Indeed, the land of Taveuni - as already explored - has long been famed for its fertility and ability to produce crops of high quality, thereby supportive of a theory of external, historical *production of underdevelopment*. The 'uneven development' of the island, then, presents itself spatially in the land, but is often interpreted in the language of racial determinism.[252] This chapter's focus on middlemen as *bridges* between conceptual worlds is reflected by their everyday movements across land and regularised contact with all groups; driving the length of the island daily, passing through villages and settlements to purchase taro, weaving through overgrown interior roads that connect the most hidden farms with the international market economy.

It is interesting to note, then, that of all interlocutors, middlemen most frequently referred to race as a fundamental determinant across social, cultural, and economic spheres. The papers one day were awash with a persistently resurfacing topic, the current Prime Minister's defence of the iTaukei word *vulagi* (visitor) to refer to Indo-Fijians as being a term of *respect* rather than, as many Indo-Fijian

[251] Britton, 1980, p.251.
[252] Lin, 2012.

communities interpreted it, *derision*.[253] Talk circled around the word and another key word: *native*. Two middlemen commented:

> *Paolo: 'There's no such thing as native anymore… it's not good…'*
>
> *Robert: 'They say don't be racist, don't be racist, it boils the water'*

Middlemen, I argue, are most conscious of the island's centrifugal racial discourse and navigate the uneven contours of socio-cultural terrain each day. The agrarian world that middlemen criss-cross is neither symmetrical nor equal, their journeys up-and-down the island traverse unequal access to markets, different cultural constraints on individualistic commercialism, and the implicit understanding that cultural difference is an irreducible part of economic life. Unevenness appears in another sense, however, in the physical experience of bumps, potholes, undulating dirt tracks, and their opposites; smooth, levelled, and gravel roads. These topographical features are, for many interlocutors, reflective of spatial hierarchies that advance ideas of relative dis/empowerment across social, cultural, and economic strata.

During a rainstorm in the south of the island, felled pawpaw trees had jammed against the culvert of a bridge in Salialevu Road and the overflowing water wore the track down so greatly that neither trucks nor buses could pass for two days. Rollers, gravelling the nearby Vuna village for the last two months, came to fix the corrugated road. Whilst farmers in the surrounding settlements were relieved, the rare sight of the rollers at this location; and the relative smoothness of the village track, was not missed on those who drove it regularly, picking up and dropping off fellow farmers. 'That's because it's the village', Soni told me, as we drive back up to the settlements, his friend, an Indo-Fijian adds immediately: 'This government, Indians have no say'. The smoothness of the village road comes to symbolise, inversely, the neglect of the settlements which, as many are keen to point out, are the major contributors to the taro market economy.[254] Ironically, the tendency is for drivers to slow down within villages and take the plantation roads at a rather more extreme pace. Uneven mobilities are entwined with the production of embodied subjectivities, as literal unevenness of the road comes to symbolise

[253] Rabuka's rather convoluted argument rested in an assertion that it was most appropriate to revert to an English term, *Fijian* (as ensured under the 2013 Constitution, Section 5, Subsection 1 of the Citizenship Act) to ensure national cohesion: *'The word Fijian is not an iTaukei word, it's an English word. We know that we are iTaukei and we always use the iTaukei word "Vulagi" for the Indian community and most of them do not want to be called "Vulagi". For us, the word vulagi is our word and that does not mean we discriminate, its means respect. However, when we use it to them despite it being an iTaukei word, they do not agree so I think we should continue to use the word Fijian because it is not a Fijian word and we know ourselves and the words we use*' (FBC News, 2023).

[254] Avinesh of Taveuni Kava and Dalo Dealers (TKDD) stated that 65% of his taro supply comes from south.

a felt sense of devaluation and disempowerment.[255] The settlements of the interior - sub-divided from the previously large European-owned estates of the colonial-era - come to identify themselves through a disenfranchised sense of un-belonging. This explains why Soni's friend quickly followed up a comment which was ostensibly on road quality with a racialised sentiment that speaks of being politically disregarded. The road connects the past and present in ways that highlight uneven access to economic and socio-political power in south Taveuni, a terrain in which middlemen drive through every day.

Defining the economic field

Taro farming in Taveuni is predominantly a male's domain, with women more often tending to vegetable gardens nearer the household. The traditional work Fijian women assume includes weaving pandanus mats, healing/massage, medicine-making, weeding crops, gleaning (foreshore fishing), and pottery. Responsibilities also extend to *soli* (fundraising) for *lotu* (church), school, and village, as well as the hosting of community functions, such as cooking and serving of food. *Solis* are a frequent feature of village life, organised as 'barrels' where the drinking of kava is central, so much so that money is rarely seen (following Toren, 2010). Bibi (2017, p.28) highlighted the underrepresented and growing role of indigenous rural women 'outside the house', too, in the sphere of tourism; through hotel work, tour guiding, and participating in handicraft production, with its attendant impacts on economic, psychological, social, and political empowerment. Most of the women she surveyed stated they controlled family financial decisions, and many were the primary breadwinners in their families.[256] As I will describe below, however, a common business type for women (especially mothers) in villages are ones that can be done from home to satisfy their other communal and familial obligations.

Taro farmers in south Taveuni present a few interrelated conundrums of economic definition that I will explore briefly. In the Marxist view the laws of capitalism do not come about until the peasant has been separated from the soil (his means of production). As many taro farmers either own the land they farm (freehold) or farm it in a *vakavanua* agreement (native land), should, then, a Marxist

[255] Mobilities research has emphasised the link between connectivity and notions of networked capital and freedom (see Sheller and Urry, 2016, Verlinghieri and Schwanen, 2020, and for Melanesian ethnography of movements as objectifying relations: Schneider, 2012). Roads often have divergent everyday meanings and engagements than those suggested by purely state-driven integrative projects (Salazar et al., 2017); the 'moral value' of these public works then often reflective of feelings of socio-economic peripheralisation and/or abandonment (Harvey and Knox, 2008, p.84). In a Fijian example, Szadziewski (2020) has employed the framing of 'anticipatory geographies' to explore Chinese infrastructure developments in the country as a part of its 'Belt and Road Initiative'. He suggests, however, that its promises of economic hope have been predominantly discursive, rather than tangible, so far.

[256] Bibi, 2017, p.30. p.94.

framework of 'exploited class' be applied to a group who retains control of their primary means of production? If this is not the case, is it that either farming on freehold, leasehold, and native land defines one's economic positionality, and what then of those many farmers who farm across more than one of these land tenure systems? Within Taveuni it is common for farmers to own freehold land or have access to native land, as well as lease land on one of the larger estates for a period of three or more years. The dynamic nature of land tenure engagement invites one challenge to an island-wide definition of taro farmers as an economic class; the evolutionism of Marxist principles (denying the possibility that communal and individual land rights may co-exist) obscures the complex interplay of land availability, tenure, and security, but also (as the previous chapter showed) the intra-dynamics of freehold and native lands that provoke questions of *definable* property.

A further challenge is defining the stable form of the middleman-peasant economic relationship, as Dow (1973, p.399) states:

> *'It is not precapitalistic because it would not exist without the invasion of a peasant or native region by capitalistic institutions; it is not feudal because it does not depend on forced labour; it is not preindustrial because goods produced by industry enter into the exchanges; and it is not capitalistic because the peasants can support themselves on their own land and are not full-time wage labourers, that is, a proletariat.'*

The middleman, here, does not control the means of production but rather occupies the middle ground between the dual economy; from 'peasant economy' to 'industrial economy', and vice-versa. A class model, then, is only appropriate if it takes into account the 'peculiar relationship' between classes not found in either fully industrial or purely agrarian societies, which is facilitated through a 'class of intermediaries'.[257] The anthropology of markets focuses attention on the local marketplaces where routinised exchange in this manner can elucidate wider institutional, socio-political, and historical factors.[258] By focusing on the role of middlemen in the taro market, I will show how commercial ideology links and delinks individuals across ethnic groups and, therein, explore the extent of class-based consciousness amongst Taveuni farmers.

At inflection points in the country's history, for example the 2000 military coup, there were attendant upswings in iTaukei dissent against economic exploitation at the hands of the *other*: *vulagi.*[259] This *other* was neither European capitalist nor colonial forces, but almost invariably Indo-Fijians, perceived

[257] Dow, 1973, p.405.
[258] Vanberg, 2001, p.9227.
[259] Kaplan 2007, p.691-70.

as economic colonisers by those iTaukei labourers who saw Indo-Fijian economic thriving as a sign that they were, in effect, economic *colonisers*, rather than the similarly colonised and exploited. A lack of agreement on terminology (*vulagi,* or the use of *Fijian* to denote all those born in Fiji) is but one sign of the centrifugal force of differential historical experience, present-day cultural demands being another, that inhibits structural coalignment of economic interests across iTaukei and Indo-Fijian groups on the island.

Farmers often referred to the peacefulness amongst different races in Taveuni, contrasting it favourably to urban centres like Labasa or Suva, as a factor of the bond between taro farmers; those who experience the same problems and desire the same prosperity. One exporter, Avinesh, summarised this viewpoint: 'Maybe they are different races, but the difficulties they are facing are the same, whether it's water, shelter, income'. In another way, Taveuni farmers bind themselves through reference to a common enemy: the vagaries of the weather and the market. In this chapter, I will focus on the second of these (and explore weather more in Chapter 5), to investigate how taro farmers situate themselves both locally and globally within the market in ways that concurrently support and challenge post-colonial racialised socio-economic identities that have come to define Fiji's national economy. Throughout I will ask to what extent shared challenges related to regularised market exchange have shaped an economic identity beyond that defined by racialising, colonial-era prescriptions made of iTaukei farmers.

Brief history of the middleman in Fiji: suspicion, collusion, and race

Drawing on first-hand accounts of commercial activity in Taveuni as well as wider scholarship on economic history in Fiji, I will briefly sketch the historical precedents that have shaped the island's economic landscape.[260] The *middleman* and the discourse of suspicion that surrounds this figure will act as an anchor from which to encircle as, by focusing on suspicion, I hope to elucidate the ways farmers in Taveuni negotiate the incursion of regularised commercialism into everyday life. Following middlemen through colonial and post-colonial periods is telling of the shifting ethnic politics on the island, wherein farmers of various ethnicities face ostensibly similar class-based struggles. The sentiment of suspicion has long been rooted in racialising national economic discourses, that have their root in colonial economic governance. In Plange's (1990) paper on the 'Three Fiji's hypothesis', he argues that to counter deterministic readings of race, a historiography of the socio-economic form

[260] For histories of trade in Fiji, see: Knapman (1987), Macnaught (1982), Lal (1992), Rokotuivuna (1972). For first-hand accounts of commercial activity in the 20th-century and 21st-century in Taveuni see: Tarte (2014), McConnell (n.d.).

that reflects the 'triumvirate of political control by state, capital, and traditional power' is better suited to understanding modern 'antagonisms' between Indo-Fijians and iTaukei:

> *'The 'antagonism' between the two dominant groups has been socio-historically constructed, through the use of political power, in the process of creating a new economy to conceal emerging classes and thus vitiate class politics and turn it into ethnic politics.'*[261]

A brief exploration of middlemen through the colonial period will begin to elucidate this process. In the early 20th-century, iTaukei farmers took copra to small-scale shopkeepers (after WWI the European shopkeeper was mostly replaced with Chinese and Indian shopkeepers), who traded imported goods insomuch that money rarely traded hands, these shopkeepers then moving the copra along to intermediaries in the major towns of Levuka or Suva. The larger plantations, such as some in the south of Taveuni – the Tarte family, for example, shipped their copra on inter-island ferry without the involvement of a buyer.[262] The large buyers on the island at this time – Burns Philp, Morris Hedstrom, Brown and Joske (later to become Carpenters) – were running at a loss and, requiring a bigger margin between local and global prices of copra, instigated collusive tactics. The General Manager of Morris Hedstrom at the time said: 'for good or for ill, we have to preserve a reality of competition between Burns Philp and ourselves, in order to keep things reasonably quiet'.[263] They soon experienced challenges from Chinese companies which drove prices up, but after a 'short sharp war' that pushed copra prices to an unprofitable level, these companies fell into alignment with the conglomerates as well. During the period of the merchants' agreement, however, the buying price of copra ultimately fell below the price of production, and many farmers reverted to subsistence farming. Knapman's (1987) conclusion from this period of economic history supports a general suspicion that middlemen have colluded with each other at the expense of iTaukei economic development throughout the colonial period, but that contrary to the logic of the discourse of suspicion; they did not do so out of immense greed, but as a response 'to the effects of competition in a depressed market'. He concludes:

> *'Mere size and a conspicuous public presence in a small colonial economy were no guarantee of market control and high profit rates… the oligopolistic nature of the domestic export and consumer goods markets, and especially the presence of some large Indian and Chinese firms, assured competition which kept buying and selling margins well below monopoly levels.'*[264]

[261] Plange, 1990, p.23.
[262] Knapman, 1987, p.85, p.90.
[263] MH General Manager quoted in: Knapman, 1987, p.98.
[264] Knapman, 1987, p.101.

Knapman's assertion that merchant capital success in Fiji was hard to come by is borne out by the evidence of the numerous failed attempts at various export products from the colony. These included bananas until the post-WW1 closure of the Australian market, coffee plantations (from both the 1880s and later in the mid-to-late-20th century), aborted attempts to produce cocoa, a brief attempt to plant rubber in 1919, pineapples before the Great Depression, macadamia nuts, and even cotton revivals in the 1920s.[265] But by and large, the main exports that took hold in Fiji were sugar in the west, and copra in the east.

The added factor of Asian competition, unlike in other parts of the colonised Pacific where European commercial interests took firmer hold, facilitated a competitive export market and brought a challenge to those European-managed merchants and planters who paid low wages and fixed the local terms of trade to their extreme benefit. Early Chinese traders, almost all of them coming from Guangdong where communally owned land shortages led people to search for greener pastures, were frequently on the receiving end of many attempts to 'deter' them from moving across the islands; evidence of the view that they threatened European traders' monopoly, which was already being challenged by the arrival of free Gujarati Indians.[266] Daryl Tarte (2014, pp.29-30) recounts a gruesome story from his youth of a Chinese Kwong Tiy shopkeeper (a commercial shop franchise that spread to the far reaches of Fiji's most remote places, aided by the fact many of the contracted Chinese men were single) who was found buried in a shallow grave on the beach near to Vuna village. The man's shop, from which he bought copra from local villagers and traded in imported goods, was found ransacked, his safe broken into, and later two villagers were found guilty of murder and hanged.

Within the context of competing middlemen and low copra prices, Fijian villagers enacted everyday forms of resistance against capitalistic exploitation in myriad ways. As early as 1863 coconut oil extraction machinery in Fiji was brought to standstill when Fijians refused to supply the coconuts on account of low prices, challenging notions of indigenous passivity.[267] Indeed, many examples of resistance against exploitation are detailed across colonial government letters held at the National Archives Fiji. Among the methods were leaving fallen coconuts on the ground,[268] or using smaller reed *vatas* (shelves) as dryers at home when dry weather permitted, as opposed to larger communal ones that required payment,[269] or to game the system by over-packing copra bags bound for drying (payment being made per bag) or undersupplying fuel to the dryers so that the copra was not thoroughly dried and would weigh more, a fact that the Chinese trader was said to not make any

[265] Knapman, 1987, p.121.
[266] Ali, 2005, p.85.
[267] Couper, 1968, p.264.
[268] F2/152, NAF.
[269] Ibid.

objection about.[270] Even when selling their produce within their own cooperative societies, old and faulty spring balances could be used to 'up-weigh' bags and overpayments were made to friends and relatives of the officers in charge of buying.[271]

Racialised economic determinism has its roots in colonial constructs; iTaukei villagers being governed by an ethics of protectionism against an outside capitalist world they were said not to be ready nor appropriate for.[272] In the late-19th and 20th century *vakaviti/vakavanua* (Fijian way of life/in the way of the land) was posited as antithetical to the capitalist way. The framing of Fijian 'ways of working' as sporadic, action-based, and inconsistent is best summarised by the idea that: 'The Fijian is naturally a gardener rather than a farmer'.[273] Racialised notions of working styles have been extended to explain the proliferation of coconut plantations in Taveuni as not only a factor of the island's amenable coastal soils, but also – contrary to sugar's constant seasonal demands - the hardy crop's resilience, which permitted a more dynamic working style that suited village life:

> *'That part of the industry for which the Fijians are themselves responsible possesses, for this reason, a particular resiliency; during periods of low prices the Fijian can afford to neglect his small holding or communal grove, to grow his food crops, and to rehabilitate his coconuts to bring them back to full production as the price improves.'*[274]

In this sense, racial determinism impacted upon the segregation of land in two respects; both the deterministic economic role of the race within the colony, and of the implicit notion of a race's 'way of working', wherein plantations were deemed not appropriate for indigenous 'gardeners'. Where farming and commerce were seen as contrasting activities which required, in some sense, external entities – Europeans, Chinese, Indians, *middlemen* – to bridge the divide, the maintenance of the 'pre-capitalist' village economy, however, reflected a political alliance between the colonial government, Fijian chieftaincy, and foreign capital.[275] Economic surplus from the export industries was largely

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[270] Ibid.
[271] Singh, 1962, p.263.
[272] However, iTaukei were always contributing to Fijian economic activity through the taxation (*lala*) system imposed upon them since the Native Labour Ordinance 1876, which restricted their mobility and ability to seek outside employment (see Lal, 1992, p.26-28, Rokolekutu, 2007, pp.30-31).
[273] Harvey, 1949, p.114.
[274] Ibid., p.108.
[275] The co-alignment of foreign capital, colonial governance, and traditional leadership is best comprehended by the following example, given by MacNaught (1982, p.114): during a six-month strike starting in February 1921 by Indo-Fijian sugar labourers there was much sympathy from iTaukei who understood the hardships they endured in the sugar-growing regions of the west, so much so that European methodists implored iTaukei not to get 'entangled' with Indians. After pressure from the Colonial Sugar Refining (CSR) company, the Provincial Officer arranged for Fijians to evict Indians who they had helped and sheltered during the strike and, in a way to ensure economic continuity as well as racial divisiveness, had iTaukei commoners replace striking Indian workers at the CSR company, for which their Chiefs were gifted engraved walking sticks for their 'loyalty'.

expatriated by the conglomerates such as Burns Philp, Morris Hedstrom, and Carpenters to Australia and benefitted local people little.[276]

On both sides of the persisting debate about iTaukei economic involvement in the colony (between communalists and individualists), the middleman was framed as the major thorn in indigenous economic development. Unjust exchange practices between wily merchants and villagers were commonplace.[277] In one such example, the Director of Agriculture, H.W. Jack, a staunch individualist, showed how in 1936 a farmer had rejected a trader's offer of 3s per bag of sweet potatoes (*kumala*), then persuaded his department to ship them to New Zealand on his behalf, receiving 10s 2d net per bag. Jack went on to assert the impact of these dealings:

> *'[H]is [Fijians] experience of middlemen is such that he regards most offers made to him with suspicion. Hence, he has no incentive to produce the crops for which markets are undoubtedly available within limits.''*[278]

Fijian socialist and feminist Rokotuivuna (1972) argued that the centrality of foreign capital during the colonial period caused post-colonial economic stagnation, remarking succinctly that 'capitalism causes underdevelopment'. However, detractors cite the argument's tautology as viewing any and all dependence as unsatisfactory. Knapman (1987) suggests along the lines of this logic that the only viable historical alternative was that Fiji became, instead, a white settler dominated colony, defined by widespread indigenous land dispossession, creating a 'rural proletariat' in the vein of other colonies such as Kenya, South Africa, and South Rhodesia.[279] Indeed, Indo-Fijian calls to unity often drew on this logic; that their labour 'saved' iTaukei from economic servitude and should, thus, invite the growth of an inter-ethnic rural proletariat united against foreign middlemen.[280] This, however, did not eventuate, as racial division continued to be maintained through segregation on the land (plantations/villages) and its underlying racialised codifications of working style (consistent/action-

[276] Rokotuivuna, 1972, p.11, p.52.
[277] MacNaught, 1982, p.135. Note: Such as grossly inflating prices of import goods, payments made with nuts, pernicious credit systems.
[278] Ibid., p.137.
[279] Knapman, 1987, pp.137-9.
[280] Lal, 1992, pp.142-3. Note: Some attempts at a farmers' movement did challenge foreign capital's stranglehold, such as the Viti Kabani of Apolosi Nawai, which established a company in 1912 to cut-out European middlemen and employ iTaukei as marketers of their own produce in the banana trade, but this neither engaged Indo-Fijians nor sought inter-ethnic solidarity (see Nicole, 2011, p.86, p.99). Other indigenous proto-cooperatives were basically producer, consumer and marketing cooperatives, including the *Au* in the Cook Island in the 1890s, *Malo* of Samoa in 1904, *Tonga ma Tonga Kautaha* of Tonga in 1909, *Tangitang Mronrons* of Gilbert and Ellice Islands in 1909 and the *Paliau Maloat* and *Yali* movement in PNG (see Vunibola, 2018).

based). In this way, the land, and its use, is one medium by which notions of racialised economic determinism act, as Plange (1990, p.31) notes, as a 'convenient means for obviating class action'.

Cooperative commerce

In the post-WW2 period, the proliferation of village shops was spurred on by the establishment of the 'cooperative movement', operated by the Registrar of Co-Operatives and the Cooperative Societies Ordinance of 1947, which drew on racialised economic identities to argue for the coalignment of communal life and the market economy within the co-operative structure.[281] Villagers could trade in copra for shares, with 'bonuses' (the profits) arriving into farmers' pockets twice yearly. As one interlocutor told me of this history: 'they collapsed Kwong Tiy… [at Kwong Tiy] when you buy something nothing comes back, that's why it went slack'. His daughter chimes in from behind us: 'It's like in your country, eh, there are many millionaires, not just one. There are many, no?'

In September 1949, Pacific Islands Monthly wrote that: 'Fijian co-operatives have now become a force in the Colony… to help free the Fijian from the middleman'.[282] That year, a total of 25 co-operatives had formed, with all but 1 being owned by iTaukei, with many more in 'various stages of development'.[283] The coexistence of cooperative stores and private stores (owned primarily by Indo-Fijians and Chinese) made implicit references to cultural difference a feature of reports on their relative successes, with private stores able to gain 'competitive edge' with granting of credit to farmers and price-cutting, knowing their losses would be recuperated once the co-operative stores were priced out of business. The Annual Report of the Registrar of Co-operatives in 1957 wrote:

> *'[M]ost private stores have built up larger stocks than societies, and can afford to wait longer for their money. Neither do they share the reluctance of co-operative committees to take legal proceedings for non-payment.'*[284]

Indeed, this 'reluctance' suggests the socio-cultural pressures at play within market exchange, reflective of contemporary complaint over 'cultures of credit' that many shop-owners referred to as crippling. Singh's (1962) conclusions are in the vein of individualists who question the capacity of communalism to allow for entrepreneurship. Indeed, the cooperative is seen as hindrance to individualist economic thriving and cannot compete against privately owned stores with their

[281] Registrar of Co-Operative Societies in Fiji, 1950.
[282] Pacific Islands Monthly, September 1949, p.48.
[283] Ibid.
[284] Annual Report of the Registrar of Co-operatives (1957), quoted in: Singh, 1962.

disembedded economic imperatives. My own data on the topic of cooperatives shows them to be a diminished economic structure (only 3/20 farmers surveyed were part of a cooperative, with between 10-14 members), however many more (7/20) want to be part of one, with structural reasons posited as one of the main attractants: cooperatives being more suitable for attracting government support, a method for instilling good values in younger farmers, employing mutual aid of shared labour and having the resources to bulk-buy farming inputs, and importantly: helping to deal with middlemen by knowing the price of taro to avoid being misled.

This brief synopsis of the racialised economic history of Fiji explicates some of the historical details that bring us to the present situation, whose roots lay in the 1993 Samoan taro leaf blight that led to a boom in the Fijian taro market, becoming Fiji's number one foreign export earner.[285] The other main factor in recent demographic changes on the island is the end of leasehold agreements on other Fijian islands, particularly the neighbouring Vanua Levu sugar farms, in the late 1990s into the 2000s.[286] Whilst Indo-Fijians have lived and worked on Taveuni since the late-19th century (with around 500-600 indentured and 'free' Indians in 1895), the population has ebbed and flowed with economic booms, demand for plantation labour, and availability of freehold/leasehold land, falling to a low of 88 Indo-Fijians in 1940, with most of these working on various estates as labourers. Available land only began to present itself in the second half of the 20th-century, with Indo-Fijian settlements establishing in Qila in the centre of the island and Qarawalu in the south. When land leases signed under the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act 1966 (ALTA) began to be terminated across Fiji by iTaukei landowners in 1997, the result was a search by dispossessed Indo-Fijian farmers for a more secure tenure arrangement. Thus, many moved away from Fiji's 'sweet dreams' of sugar to find freehold land in the Garden Island of taro and kava.

<u>The market calls</u>

> *Sam: 'Probably about 2016, when government introduced free bus fares and free education, all of a sudden, the supply of dalo slumped, and then agriculture went around and tried to find out what was the problem, and a lady stood up in one of the meetings and said:*
>
> *"Well, you people caused the problem, now my husband doesn't have to plant x amount of taro to meet this need of bus fares and education, so he's quite happy cos now his workload's gone down."*

[285] Onwueme, 1999, p.23.
[286] Alexandra et al., 2019.

Yeah, it's quite funny, but that's how people think here, you know you work as much as you need to, people aren't very ambitious – that may be wrong, you can't say that they're not ambitious – but people are quite comfortable with a very simple lifestyle. And it's something that – when I first came here I found that a bit hard, you know I grew up in the towns and cities where you had to have money all the time, so the values are a bit different, here the family comes first, and your cultural obligations, making money and getting rich sort of is just to meet those needs really.'

Sam's story connects the 'push to export' to self-conscious cultural critique, to which I will now turn. To make sense of the semi-commercial agricultural landscape of Taveuni, I will draw on Appadurai's (2024) notion of 'agricultural reasoning' under subsistence capitalism. The conditions that result in subsistence capitalism, a system relatively impervious to change, are a relatively low agricultural productivity, smallholdings as the primary farm type, and minimal mechanisation. The presence of capitalist commercialisation, thus, is insufficient to raise all but a very few above what is considered a subsistence income. Agricultural reasoning, in Appadurai's (2024, p.15) terms, is a factor of agriculture's inherent relationality:

'agriculture cannot be reduced to its technical dimensions…[i]t is itself immersed in a form of reason that is inescapably cultural.'

In this way, the agrarian world of Taveuni can be:

'a full cultural expression, while also being poor, unequal, and peripheral.'

To reason, agriculturally, then is to navigate the terrain of the socio-cultural, wherein relationality is first-and-foremost an asset. Importantly, Appadurai (2024, p.14, *italics* added) remarks, 'relationality here does not mean *symmetry*, though it does mean *reciprocity'*. The push for agricultural exports has provided Taveuni farmers with a centripetal pull together, towards market relationality and intensive farming practices. The centrifugal pull of historical, racialised economic identities, however, remains, and is often euphemised on farms and within the marketplace. Racial contention is often acted out in regularised ways, neither denied nor hidden but expressed as a fact of social life in Taveuni. Indo-Fijian dominance in economic pursuit has long been seen as 'balanced' with Fijian dominance over land. The oft-repeated sentiment within villages and settlements of iTaukei underdevelopment ranged from benign acceptance to deep cultural critique. Agriculture, and specifically the agricultural export market, becomes a key site where farmers can vent their frustrations and question notions of symmetry and reciprocity.

iTaukei self-conscious auto-ethnography

Fieldnotes, just outside Vuna village, 15th January 2024

I see Eroni relaxing in the shade of a breadfruit tree in Vuna veikau outside the village, on his way home from the farm where he'd been since 5am. He is jovial and when I admit astonishment that he was at the farm so early, he contrasts this quickly with the people in Nakorovou ('the new village' of Vuna, despite it being present before its conjoined village on top, Kanacea): 'lazy', he says. His people are the Lauans, who make up Kanacea, named after the Lauan island which their ancestors had left after its sale in 1868 to a European settler by the Tui Cakau on account of their perceived betrayal of him during the Tongan War. Eroni says, with a t-shirt wrapped around his head gathering sweat:

'The agriculture department told us it was good to plant coconut trees, it will make the dalo sweeter, the yaqona stronger, you can drink less and feel it, not like if you drink plenty eh, you feel it the next day, want to sleeeep. Fijians sleep a lot. They sleep, wake up, hang around, play rugby, grog. Us in Kanacea, we're different. From Lau eh, Lauans. They call us the 'Fijian Indians', cos we work hard [laughing]. That's what I try to teach my kids'.

Self-conscious references to race and culture as economically determinant are a feature of much the agricultural discourse on the island. In this section I will provide a few ethnographic snapshots of the tendency towards everyday auto-ethnographic reflexivity amongst interlocutors. Secondary services on the island are predominantly Indo-Fijian owned, such as the three main stores in the centre and south of the island, and the attached hardware shop that supplied necessary items such as cane knifes, shovels, and chemical fertilisers. It was those Indo-Fijians and iTaukei in the settlements who were intermediaries, could run businesses, and export their primary products. A middle-aged woman of mixed iTaukei and European descent, who ran a women's cooperative, told me – as she planned her trip to buy *sulus* (a type of sarong) to 'upsell' in one of her trips to Suva – pointing to her head and laughing: 'maybe it's cos we have some English in us, eh?'.

A common business for women with young kids in the village was run out of the living room or adjunct room of a person's house: the canteen. This small, in-house shop supplied many of the same basic products as the larger shops (sugar, salt, flour, crackers, toiletries, sweets, and noodles), but at a slightly higher price, the price of proximity and convenience. But these in-village businesses struggled against social pressures that oft-proved insurmountable: 'This one here is a non-profit!', Lavenia bellowed, as we did calculations on her ice-block business that she ran out of her kitchen. Even selling an average of forty blocks per month, the costs of all the constituent ingredients, packing, plus electricity costs meant she was, in fact, losing money with each sale, without even accounting for her labour time. She

remarks that other block sellers stopped selling for reasons of unprofitability. When I suggest she halve the size or take out some of the milk – the most expensive ingredient – she says people would complain. Later, when she sought work outside of the house, at a nearby shop, her husband complained that he would find another wife to take care of their young kids. Months later she departed the settlement with three of her children to resettle in Suva, finding work at a restaurant.

Frequent abuse of credit (*dinau*) meant that one canteen-owner was owed hundreds of dollars, which she assumed she would never see, her only recourse to put up a sign reading 'No Credit Given' stuck to the back wall. A woman who had moved from the city to Vuna, her husband's village, said her attempts at starting a business of bread-making had been stifled by back-biting, 'it's really hard to raise money…when you try to do business they try to bring you down', she remarked bitterly.[287] The village politics of commerce made it impossible for women to charge prices that would make their businesses viable, let alone profitable. As Toren (1999a, pp.77-78) notes in Gau, the promotion of the Protestant work ethic as constitutive of the Fijian 'way according to the land', and money's enmeshment within the indigenous 'kinship nexus', could turn the notion of profit variously into a righteous deed *or* an immoral act (if it was not readily given away in demonstrations of kinship). These suspicions, I suggest, could be made worse by the fact women mostly moved to their husband's village, where she took sustenance from the land of his ancestors who had made the land fertile. Commanding profit, then, even from products made from ingredients sourced from far-afield (such as in the case of bread), may well invite further challenge on gendered grounds, indicative of the traditional view that Toren (1988, p.709) writes of: '[women] had only an indirect access to *mana*: through men'.[288] Inversely, one day reminiscing about her time working in the tourism sector, Lavenia told me that Indo-Fijian wives got to 'hold the credit card' and took charge of the house's finances in ways that were not permitted iTaukei women. Racialised notions of economic *freedom* were often aligned with a strand of in-group blame:

> *Jay (on the boat from Taveuni to Suva): 'Indians do witchcraft to make themselves successful. Fijians do it to keep everyone down.'*

Jay's words are suggestive of the role witchcraft plays in frameworks of moral agency. Taken as a meta-accusation, his statement reads as both a belief in supernatural forces at play within socioeconomics, *and* as a critique of communalism. Anthropological attention to witchcraft has shown its widespread appearance is often connected with social tension and scapegoating, where underlying the accusation

[287] Where demands were too great, causing the closure of these small shops, it is said that kin had '*kana ilavo*' (eaten money) (Williksen-Bakker 2002, p.81).
[288] Toren, 1988, p.708-709.

of witchcraft is a material inequality.[289] In turn, when a friend told me that 'jealousy' was the reason she had gotten sick on returning to her village, she made me promise not to visit the house of the suspected sorcerer. Her implicit suggestion being that, as she was visiting from the city, people who had known her when she was younger now had it out for her. The most common type of intra-ethnic (iTaukei) witchcraft accusation is that which involves drinking kava, either in its wholesale rejection as a practice of idolatry (as in Fijian Pentecostal readings) or in the surreptitious 'dipping of one's thumb' into the shared bowl, symbolising malign intent. As one interlocutor told me: 'they're sometimes not even aware they're doing it', suggesting its uncontrollable aspect and that it may be passed on generationally, in much the same way as cultural, moral norms.

Interlocutors regularly reflexively engaged and critiqued an objectified 'culture' of communality in ways that posited it as an inhibition to iTaukei thriving:

> *Marica: 'Our culture is affecting children, it's affecting children [raising her voice]. Just imagine if you're having a function in our house, and the children they want to – if you have visitors inside your house, because when we have a function they will come to your house - no time to sleep, you'll have the people sleep in the room while your children have to find their own way, no time to do their homework, no time to study, some houses they drink kava every night…'*

Marica contrasted this communality, and the sizeable expense of large birthday gatherings ('it's like a climate change in our country' she said, wryly), with Indo-Fijians: 'The Indians are very smart, yeah, they will keep their money. Even when they have their wedding, or somebody dies, they won't cook any meat. But Fijians, no, they don't care'. The cultural expectation of feasting on special occasions put intense economic demands on families (one cow could cost thousands of dollars). Thus, the phrase *kuri na niu* (scraping the coconut) became synonymous with the end of festivities when the visitors would finally begin leaving, the sound of scraping meaning that the meat had come to an end and *lolo* (the squeezed juice of scraped coconut) would soon be served. Cultural demands, thus, incite regular and self-conscious moments of reflection and critique; wherein 'culture' comes to be defined against market-oriented rationalism. Dialogue in the economic sphere, then, exposes many iTaukei to what they perceive as their opposite: a liberal (in the economic sense) individual.

Where notions of racial determinism have long sustained inter-ethnic tensions, critiques of iTaukei culture in relation to *individual thriving* contribute to an in-group blame that reflects the demands of the export market. In the following section, I will foreground the middlemen again, to explore how they navigate the asymmetrical 'full cultural expression' of Taveuni's taro market and how, in turn, they

[289] Forsyth, 2016, p.336.

are perceived. I will suggest that they engage the troubled history of *exporters as outsiders* through varied methods; resisting *outsider* categorisation, whilst holding the tension of market pressures within their intermediary position; principally the intertwined logics of market *time* and market *price*.

Setting the scene: Taveuni's taro market

There are three main export businesses on the island, two owned by Indo-Fijians - Taveuni Kava and Dalo Dealers (TKDD) and Road King Farms - and one owned by a *Kailoma* of mixed ancestry (indigenous/European) – Ben's Trading (see Table 2 for company descriptions). Racial determinism extends to this entrepreneurial sphere but inverts previous distinctions between iTaukei and Indo-Fijian. This was made clear to me in a return to Taveuni in April 2025 when I saw the building of a new taro processing unit in Wairiki township. After asking about this development, a farmer I knew from the south of the island commented that it was a Chinese man who had been running a small operation in Naqara and was expanding his business. He added: 'Chinese is good, cos the Fijians and Indo-Fijians all know each other. Chinese are different, it's good'. The implicit suggestion being that the role of the middleman submerged racial difference, morphing previous cultural distinctions between iTaukei/Indo-Fijians through an alignment of economic interest, and suggesting a tendency towards collusion disadvantageous to farmers.

	TKDD	**Road King**	**Ben's Trading**
Owner	Indo-Fijian	Indo-Fijian	Kailoma
Established in Taveuni	2004 approx.	2022	2003 approx.
Head office	Delaivuna, south Taveuni	Waiyevo, central Taveuni	Wairiki, central Taveuni
Processing plant	Suva, Viti Levu	Waiyevo, central Taveuni	Navua, Viti Levu
Staff	5-8 staff/buyers in Taveuni 40 staff in Suva processing plant (31 women, 9 men)	10 staff/buyers in Taveuni 70 staff in Taveuni processing plant (predominantly women)	14 staff/buyers in Taveuni 200 staff in Navua processing plant (predominantly women)
Exports	Taro (85-90%), Kava (10%) Occasional: cassava, breadfruit, jackfruit, plantain, chillis.	Taro, Cassava, Breadfruit (all fresh and frozen).	Taro Occasional: yam, breadfruit, cassava.
Exports to	New Zealand	New Zealand, Australia	New Zealand, Australia, USA, Tuvalu
Export quantity of taro per week	22.5 tons / wk (approx.)	12 tons / wk (approx.)	40-50 tons / wk (approx.)

Table 2. Description of export businesses in Taveuni.

Political economy of export industry in Taveuni

In this section, I want to expand on the ways that the taro export market has impacted the political economy of knowledge on the island to suggest ways that the interplay of agrarian, ritual, and market temporalities makes for a complex layering of imperatives. I will then move from supply side to demand side, to posit that taro imports in countries such as New Zealand and Australia act as both material and symbolic connections to home. This also, however, suggests the limits to which inter-Pacific *foodscapes* can challenge globalised capitalism's pull towards territorial disintegration, commodity fetishism, and invokes legacies of islands as static in time. Their image of *fixity* from outside – a place one can always return to - is consistently troubled by the intense indigenous interest in trajectories of decline: of soils, yields, and socio-cultural life. In turn, temporal misalignments are negotiated, maintained, and frequently promoted, by middlemen, in their role as bridge between *on/off* the island.

Historically, as explored above, the main exports of Fiji have been clearly delineated 'commodities', separated from indigenous life either by its introduction (*cotton*), non-use (*bêche-du-mer, sandalwood*), spatial distance (large European-owned plantations at a distance from villages), or its processing (*sugar cane*, *copra* used for coconut oil, which relied on high meat content, as opposed to the types of coconut that were traditionally used for coconut milk (*lolo*) or coconut water (*wai-ni-biu*)). Indeed, many of these commodities still form part of some islander's economic life, though not their cultural life. For example, *bêche-du-mer* (*sasalu*) harvesters in Vuna village sold their finds at $8 FJD per cucumber to Chinese buyers and could make thousands of dollars during the six-month lifting of the moratorium on harvesting; but most had never tried to eat it, despite its export from the area going back as far as 1840.[290]

> *Elote, speaking of her Chinese business colleagues: 'I am a Christian. I believe in God, and I read the word of God. That is my belief. This is their belief. If they eat this, it will heal all their sickness, pains, it's like that.'*

Bêche-du-mer is considered an oddity in large part, something that we were invited to spectate at, poke and prod, to wonder together at what kinds of places and plates these creatures would end up in.[291] Inversely, there is nothing strange about taro to islanders, it is a staple crop that 'has to be there'.

[290] Sayes, 1982, p.175.

[291] However, a man in his 70s once told me that as kids they would often go to the shallow waters and pick sea cucumbers to eat, which was done until the 1990s, but that this was no longer possible: 'Before the Asian countries come, eh, we could get it in the shallow water, now, they go very deep'. One method of cooking the sea cucumbers was to stuff them full of green pawpaw and boil it (which cooked them faster), then discard the pawpaw, and add cooked fish.

For this reason, its commercialisation invites an analysis of processual commodification. *Tausala-ni-Samoa* - a popular cultivar of taro *(Colocasia esculenta)* – was first introduced to the island after the taro leaf blight hit the Samoan export market in 1993, leading to Fiji's ascension to export market dominance. The variety derives from the Niuean Pink; its pink-flesh is softer than red/white varieties making it popular with Pacific Islander communities in New Zealand and Australia. In contrast, the non-export variety *dalo-ni-tana (Xanthosoma sagittifolium)*, which has been present far longer in Taveuni, is more resilient to drought and many of the pests which affect *Colocasia* taro. However, due in part to flavour preference abroad – and the fact it produces many small cormlets, as opposed to one big corm – *dalo-ni-tana* is mainly grown for personal consumption, despite many interlocutors' comments that it was, in their opinion, tastier than *tausala*. Thus, the market has made *tausala* a commodity whilst *dalo-ni-tana* remains on the island, planted in gardens closer to the home and linked to notions of traditional resilience. *Tausala*, then, *becomes* a 'commodity' through the everyday permeation of commercial ideology into agrarian discourse, exemplified by the language of agricultural entrepreneurship (see Table 3). The political economy of knowledge that was once primarily ecological, dictated by the Fijian calendar (*Vola ni Vula Vakaviti*), is now dictated by market trends wherein authority is held by middlemen.

Dalo tausala-ni-Samoa	***Dalo ni tana***
Foreign	traditional
Export	gift
Market	kinship
Farms	gardens
Chemicals	organic
Independence	interdependence
Rejects	no rejects
Equality	hierarchy
Profit	generosity
Energy intensive	sustainable
Durable	tasty
Consumption (just corm)	proliferation (petioles attached)
Stealing	*Kerekereing*
Harvested before *mata*	Lots of *mata* for replanting

Table 3. Taro types. Derived from Toren's (2010, p.152) and Lindstrom's (1991, p.6) structural calculus of forms. Of course, this is an idealised division of commercial/non-commercial exchange.

As Table 3 highlights, *tausala-ni-Samoa* denotes a shift to markets, profits, rejects, stealing, and the twinned notions of independence and equality (in an idealised vision of markets). Within this economy of intimate commodities, that which is traditional is made foreign - not only through physical movement across nations - but also in the altered doctrinal knowledge of market-oriented discursive regimes. Lindstrom (1991) refers to disciplinal knowledge as secret (the knowledge of markets), and doctrinal knowledge as public - the dominant ideology that is highly non-formalised (in this case:

commercialism). In this melee of varied voices, middlemen are 'conversationally empowered', their connection to the opaque, secret, mystical market economy allowing them to speak on topics involving farm management with authority.[292] The unpredictability of the price of taro appeared to many to be a cause of middlemen's propensity to keep something important hidden from farmers as an implicit way to hold on to power, a way of being 'very smart'; a sense of 'budgeted revelation'.[293] The daily topic of the price of taro maintains the position of the middleman as one who is always framed as holding a secret; keeping everyone else in a state of unknowing. Ritual and ecological periodicities are replaced within this market-oriented world, new taro calendars form, and time itself becomes a commercialised resource.

Figure 7. Graph of monthly supply tonnage on the wall at Ministry of Agriculture extension office in Waiyevo, Taveuni.

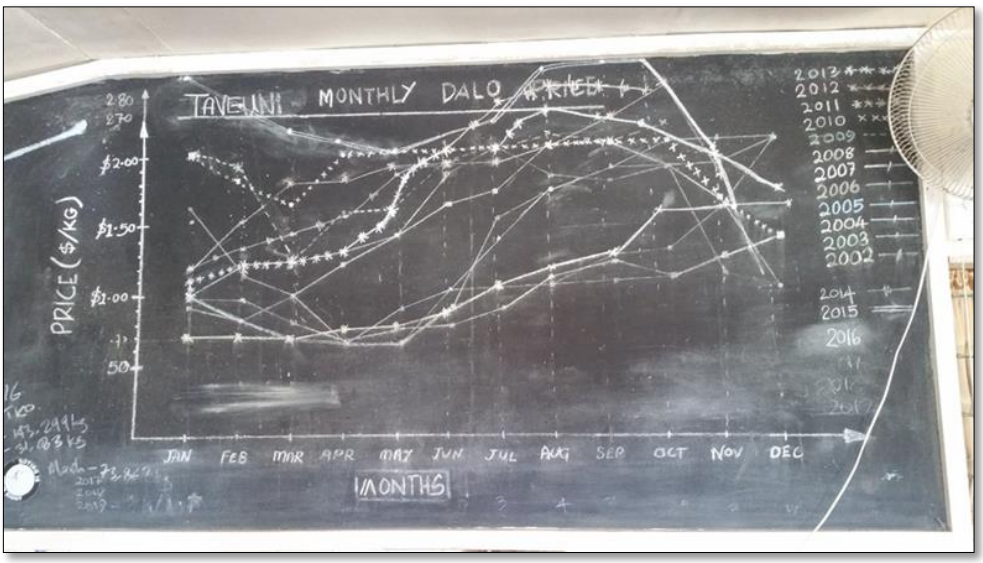

Figure 8. Graph of monthly taro price on the wall at Ministry of Agriculture extension office in Waiyevo, Taveuni.

[292] Lindstrom, 1991, p.167, p.46.
[293] Ibid., p.120.

As Figures 7 and 8 show, taro exports from Taveuni normally increased as the year progressed, and taro prices normally reached a peak around October and were their lowest in the first quarter of the year. In environmental surveys, half of respondents pointed to June-November as the primary time for selling taro, whilst 3 out of 12 farmers said there was no difference across the year, each of these being larger sellers farming on a mix of freehold and leasehold land (between 500-1000kg per month). Indeed, the graphs above have not been updated for many years, and some buyers now speak of a time when 'from January to December, the price of dalo is $4' (a good price).

> *Lusi (taro buyer for Road King Farms): 'Before, the price of dalo November, December, January, February, until April - it's going down, drop down… so myself, with my family - before we had to plant in that period, from the last quarter to the first quarter, from November to April, to target when the price is good - but now, it's okay, we can plant from January to January.'*

This sense of atemporality is permitted by a stable market price which, with the arrival of Road King Farms post-pandemic, has led to much hope that the island's natural fertility can be best exploited: 'now, we have to plant anytime, anyhow, any day'. Considering that the y-axis in Figure 8 does not go above $2.80, we can surmise that taro farmers today have it far better than any time before. However, in this respect, and with the rising cost of living, the fluctuations that still persisted in the industry (with the price changing week-to-week, contrasting Lusi's claims of stability), and despite the price always remaining above $2 during the time of my fieldwork (2023-24), led to much suspicion that the buyers were in fact either: making up the price themselves, or fixing with other buyers to keep the price down.

In early December 2023, the price was $4 FJD/kg, and an expatriated family member reported back the price in New Zealand was $35 FJD/kg: 'big profit eh', her sister remarked to me. In April 2024, however, the price paid to farmers was down to $2.30 FJD/kg, whilst many farmers remarked that the price 'that side' rarely changed. The invariance of taro prices in New Zealand, often fed back by family

Figure 9. Photograph of *tausala-ni-Samoa* being washed at Road King Farms

members who had emigrated, was put at odds with the variance in buying price (see Figure 9 of taro being processed). In conjunction with the increasing cost of living on the island, this led to many reflecting that they were somehow, inexplicably, being cheated. I will explore these suspicions ethnographically in the final section on the road with middlemen. Some of this suspicion and economic opacity, however, must be explained off-island, in the supermarkets of other countries, where fresh and frozen taro provokes a very different kind of relationship to islands and *time*.

Intimate commodity chains

The commodification of taro makes for an intimate market as the flow of the crop from islands to islanders living abroad constitutes a 'foodscape' of the connections maintained to *place* through *food*. The intimacy of this Pacific Islander economy challenges a tenet of globalisation that negates the value of relations of people and posits place as irrelevant to its machinations. The question remains, however: to what extent do consumers in these intimate commodity chains seek out provenance to connect to people, to produce, or to place, and to what effect? More profoundly, as a question of markets and mutuality, is the way that exported taro connects Taveuni farmers with their expatriated friends and family 'an assertion of community *or* its mystification?'[294]

In the packing sheds of Road King farms, taro corms are placed into 500g plastic bags, emblazoned with the name and logo of the wholesaler; their design, copy, and overall appearance made for the supermarket aisle: '*Pacific Crown… From the Pristine Islands of Fiji*'.[295] The wording may be luxuriant, but the design is simple and utilitarian; unlike the kinds of Fijian exports that play on consumer's sense of *fantasy* about Fiji. In Kaplan's study of Fiji Water and commodity fetishism, she highlights the kind of vantage point the consumer is often compelled to assume, peering – perhaps jealously – back at the pristine, untouched, paradisical springs that bring forth water that, the advertising would tell us, will connect us with that purity. Ironically, however, she states:

> *'[T]he success of the water company relies less on the success of Fiji's indigenes or their actual political plans than it does on global consumer's hopes for (or fantasies about) Fiji's indigenes, and perhaps desire to connect with them.'*[296]

The taro commodity chain being a predominantly islander-to-islander trade (from those on islands, to those expats in New Zealand and Australia), the extent to which this 'intimacy' provides a challenge to

[294] Gudeman, 2009, p.29, *italics* added.
[295] Note: Pacific Crown is a brand name for Food Processors Fiji Limited, a government commercial entity established in 1989.
[296] Kaplan, 2007, p.692.

the fetishist should be explored. Whilst Table 3's structuralist approach intimates an idealised form that makes export taro a 'commodity', the anthropology of food has shown the ways in which people as consumers consistently make food personal.[297] Indeed, food in the Pacific islands is frequently a metric by which the balance between tradition and modernity is measured, with declining use of local foods a symbol of the loss of embodied cultural relations.[298] In turn, since at least the 1950s the import of Pacific island taro into New Zealand has been understood as driven not only by the culinary preferences of immigrants but also a deeper desire to connect to island homes in a foreign environment.[299] As Caldwell (2006) terms it, 'nostalgia cuisine' connects people with home and, indeed, *the past*.

Interlocutors were keen to point out that the consumer 'knew' that the taro came from Taveuni ('they know it comes from this side, from south Taveuni'), ostensibly because of its taste. The importance of provenance challenges globalisation's deterritorialization and disintegration of place. Inversely, *attachment* to place is employed to encourage expats to consume products *from home*, in the case of competing taro producing Pacific Island states, drawing on the moral logic of support. I wondered when visiting taro processing units, however, if *knowing* that the taro was from Taveuni was indeed possible. The packaging for Pacific Crown had at one time read: *'From the island of Taveuni'* but presently 'Taveuni' had been replaced by 'Fiji', and in the phraseology 'Pristine Islands', Fiji had in a sense become symbolic of, more generally, the *past*. Representing an imagined past is not anything new to islands, their rendering of space into time a holdover of the kinds of 'belittlement' that have long imagined islands as an image of both unchanging fixity and anticipated vanishing (to be further explored in Chapter 5).[300] The vision of islands as *timeless* is clearly felt in the word '*pristine'*, and yet the discourse of decline ubiquitous in Taveuni made the packaging of the produce appear anachronistic, as speaking of an allegorical past that, in its commodification, was threatening the present. This denial of simultaneity (through globalisation's drive to emphasise, rather than obfuscate, the 'cultural particularities of time and place')[301] draws on connotations of a past, that contrary to Kaplan's Global North consumer, is far more intimate - as the slogan for Cibus, the New Zealand based wholesaler that is supplied by Taveuni Kava and Dalo Dealers (TKDD), highlights: '*Cibus: A Taste of Home'*. The 'home' that this marketing proposes, however, frequently draws on discursive slippage; from Taveuni, to Fiji, to a so-called 'pristine' past. As I look again at the packaging of export taro, I wonder: is this past personal, pre-modern, or an enticing mix of the two?

[297] See Imbruce, 2006, Wilk, 2006.
[298] Egan et al., 2006, pp.23-24.
[299] Watson, 2019 [1979], pp.151-153.
[300] DeLoughrey, 2019, p.166 & p.179.
[301] Caldwell, 2006, p.58.

I argue that this slippage incurs a cost on the ability for consumers to connect to the reality of production, indeed (following Kaplan, 2007), consumers' 'hopes' (either for connection; or *return*) become, in part, 'fantasies' of entangled personal-historical variation, disconnected from the present. Indeed, the lack of inclusion of externalities (i.e. environmental degradation) into pricing of agricultural goods is suggestive of the *disembedded* nature of these commodity chains. Whilst the fair-trade movement, for example, has been viewed as a disruptor of consumption's middlemen, rolling back 'commodity fetishism and reconnect[ing] consumers and producers,' in the Taveuni case, the middleman remains the bridging voice between consumer and producer.[302] Their role is to elide processes of transfer, and in doing so mystify the relationship between present and past; between consumption and production. Globalised intimacy is thus limited by the lack of proximate contact, familiarity, and trust that accrues through embeddedness within economic and moral landscapes. The moment of consumption becomes itself fetishised to reconnect to home, to pristine islands, and to reinhabit these through the consumptive act. One of my interlocutor's words comes back around, echoing: 'the middlemen are *eating* us'.

Ethnography of Middlemen

Sanjay's farm in Navaca, Salialevu Road, 5th January 2024.

Sanjay and his wife come out to meet us as we step out of the truck; myself, Robert, and two young workers, Junior and Simi, who immediately throw some FMF 50kg flour sacks on the floor, next to a parked truck, loaded with taro. Sanjay's daughter stands behind a mesh door inside their nicely painted, very clean looking house, two large water tanks outside. Simi and Junior take the taro which is piled in the back of Sanjay's truck and start packing them into FMF sacks. The bottom row is put in sucker-first, after that they are jammed in with some force, root first, filling the sacks to the brim. Once filled, they make small holes with a pointed wooden stick in the top of each sack and wind a red ribbon through the holes, criss-crossing the top of the sac to seal the taro inside. A full sack is between 47-63kg today, and in total the packing takes about thirty minutes; they are the largest sellers of the day at nearly 500kg (today Robert buys a total of 1400kg taro from multiple different farmers, all paid in cash). Junior then pokes the wooden stick horizontally through the centre of the bag and hooks the scale to the wooden stick which the two boys lift on their shoulders, until the sack is off the ground and the scale's reading stabilises. Robert calls out the number and I note down the weights next to their name,

[302] Nicholls, 2010, p.242.

then add them together and multiply the number by whatever price Robert tells me, ranging from $4.5 to $5 today. In total, at $4.80/kg, this couple earn about $2,500 (Robert gives a slightly higher price for bigger suppliers). Sanjay's wife serves us delicious, very sweet ginger tea, and we stand around drinking.

Before we leave, a young Indo-Fijian farmer approaches us, he is skinny and in his early twenties. He seems surprised to see Robert and tells him he sold his taro for $4.10 earlier in the day to another buyer. Robert tells him: 'You need to think of everybody around, it will bring the price down'.

After the young man leaves, Robert shakes his head in frustration to Sanjay.

Ravi's farm in Delaivuna

Later that day, we are outside the house of another Indo-Fijian farmer, a man in his forties. Junior and Simi remain quiet whilst packing the taro, Robert does most of the talking, switching between English and Hindi, which the young men nor I are conversant in. The talk moves from a couple of local boys who were caught stealing taro last year, to Robert saying that his workers had just called him from the warehouse in Wairiki to tell him one of his trucks had been involved in an accident. He is furious.

> *Robert: 'See, I'm not at home, I'm not at home, if I'm home I will make decisions at home, when you're in your farm you make decisions in your farm. See, one of the dalo buyers asked us, asked our carpenter to take the lorry to get the dalo. Bumped another vehicle. See? That's the problem when you get out of the house. See? You understand, eh? The workers they think that they can make their own decisions when they are at home, when you're not there. So, when they want to butako [steal], they'll butako! So, at the moment, I'm very angry with the people.'*
>
> *Ravi [after a pause]: 'You bring one cooler, eh, Nilesh [of Road King Farms] every day - you buy the dalo, good - every day.'*
>
> *Robert: 'Every day? Io, eh.'*
>
> *Ravi: 'Yeah, io.'*
>
> *Robert: 'But not plenty, he is not buying plenty, they can't buy plenty.'*
>
> *Ravi: 'Nilesh, eh? He talk different this time, he talk different, Nilesh, wooooo.'*
>
> *Robert: 'All you people small eh, everybody small eh.'*

Ravi: 'He talk different this time, can't talk, before set [good], eh? But this time, can't talk… before set eh, he talk with my family, this time; can't.'

Robert: 'You're not family anymore. Myself, you're giving me the dalo, or you don't give me the dalo, I will talk to you.'

Ravi: 'No no, you're different, I know, I give some time dalo, only one time I give - two time, two time –'

Robert [interrupting]: 'No no, I mean; we should be like that, this is not – this thing is only dalo [Ravi: yeah, only dalo] we should always care for each other [Ravi: human beings eh, love your neighbour] because we are living, eh? It's not good – buyer, it's not everything, you know? You have to have relatives, then that's good.'

Ravi: 'He talks like that, eh.'

Robert: 'He can swear at you [Sanjay: this time you can't talk to Nilesh] he wants to be something [Sanjay: before set eh] before set, now not set [not good]. [Pause] The mother?'

Ravi: 'Mother set, my daughter there.'

Robert: 'Your daughter where?' [Robert's phone rings and he takes a call.]

The above exchange highlights some of the social tension inherent within the role of the middleman, straddling the dual definition of loyalty across commercial and social spheres. Robert comments that Nilesh is not buying much taro, even with his cold-processing facility recently opening on the island and maintains that relationships are of primary importance to him, above economic ('he wants to be something'). Ravi's response is both affirming and defensive: 'No, no, you're different', before quickly assuring him of his sense of loyalty; he has only 'one time… two time, two time' sold taro to another buyer. In both scenarios above, Robert distances himself from the buyer role ('it's not everything, you know'), to align his concern with the farmer ('You need to think of everybody around, it will bring the price down'). But the middleman's transnational identity, as linkage between local marketplace and global market, requires them to *re-present* the opacity of supply-and-demand economics at the farm gate daily; even Robert's flexible buying price (on account of supply quantity and prior relations) can invite suspicion, as prices appear to change according to the buyer's whims.[303]

[303] In the space of three weeks in March 2024 the price ranged from $2 to $4.50 per kilogram.

The commercialisation of 'farmer's sweat', as many interlocutors framed it, frames the middleman as a parasitical figure outside the sociality underpinning life in Taveuni. But that is not the case, as Robert suggests above, the importance of 'caring for each other' is above economic considerations. He contrasts himself with Nilesh ('You're not family anymore') and immediately asks about Ravi's family, before getting interrupted by further calls about expensive repairs to be done on his truck. In the car later, Robert, who is a Kailoma (part-indigenous/part-European descent) remarked about his Indo-Fijian suppliers: 'they don't joke around with any Tom, Dick or Harry, but I can joke with them, even the ladies, it's like that'. The ability to speak both Fijian and Hindi was a feature of three out of four buyers who I spent most time with. This permittance to 'joke around' across what are still relatively spatially and socially segmented groups on the island was one commonality that middlemen shared. Another was their propensity to distance themselves from a 'businessman' identity, Robert was especially vocal about his dislike of his management role and the attendant unending stream of phone calls (such as the one that interrupted his asking after Ravi's family), often accompanied by a pained expression: 'My brain is always going 100mph, it's not good… when I go, I am going for good'. The following quotes by middlemen exemplify the particular framing of their entrepreneurial identity:

> *Robert: 'The buyers are actually farmers, they are not businessmen, they are farmers themselves… I like work, work, work. I don't really want to own a business, but I – I like to work.'*
>
> *Avinesh: 'My elder sister and her husband are working in Suva as general manager. I love to stay in the island and enjoy my life here.'*
>
> *Lusi: '[The manager] came down to us four times, he asked us to buy dalo for him, we don't like it – we like farming – and the fifth time he came, we met, and he asked us, so we say yes to him because he put the price up… So we just wanted to support him, that's why we say yes to him, cos we are all farmers, when it's time to harvest we have to be happy with the price of dalo we are selling.'*

In assuming the dual role of farmer-buyer, the middleman symbolically moves from the opacity of the *market* into the transparency of *sweat*. The buyer has the responsibility to buy the taro when it is ready, for it cannot stay in the ground once it is matured (6-7 months, as one farmer who left it in the ground too long found out when many of his corms were rejected for a soft white interior that evidenced over-maturation). TKDD were keen to contrast themselves positively on social media against buyers who do not buy produce when the farmers 'really need it'. One day I am buying taro with one of Road King's buyers, a couple, at an Indo-Fijian settlement off Salialevu Road, and as we are leaving the lady, Lusi, tells the family that the market is 'flooded' right now and the 'order is finished'. When we get in the car, she remarks that her family are planning to harvest around three-thousand taro and

thus are not taking orders for anymore.[304] This euphemising of their own preoccupation to sell their produce, as farmers as well as buyers, makes clear how suspicion may arise when buyers employ 'budgeted revelation' to conceal, in some sense, the duality of their role.

Relationships between middlemen and farmers are both informal and bound by investment of farming implements on the exporters' side. Some exporters have informal 'contracts' with farmers (such as TKDD who have a 'price floor guarantee' of $3/kg with the Senimokosoi Youth Group of twelve farmers in Vuna village and supply them with agrochemicals deducted from their profits), though many others survey the price offered across the buyers when they are ready to harvest. These farmers, who may supply in great quantities, but at irregular times, can influence the price offered to those who are more consistent in their supply. The entanglement of consistency, trust, and loyalty, were frequent matters of concern for buyers and sellers alike, as Sam - who runs a local environmental NGO - encapsulates:

> *'That's the people that sort of spoil the price, you know, all of a sudden they've got a big lot to sell, but the buyers they usually have people that they know will supply them every month, so they'll support them. But then there's gotta be this agreement between the buyers and the farmer, and I was saying too; the farmers too have no loyalty. Around 2000, I used to buy taro for one of my aunties - a big buyer here – and then somebody comes in and they offer these farmers 5 cents more per kilogram, you know - when you're buying taro they loan money from you, you help them - but if somebody gives them 5 cents they forget about all that, they sell all their taro. When you turn up - oh sorry somebody's taken all our taro… that loyalty thing.'*

Though there has been frequent talk of a taro farmers' union amongst Taveuni farmers, the relative transience and mobility of many taro farmers – many coming for one season and selling out, or leaving the island during the taro's 6-7 month growing season to get work on the mainland in the sugar cane harvest, construction, or other temporary jobs – is a hindrance to setting up such an organisation. 'It's a hard market to break into and – they're all working together, the buyers', Sam adds, cynically. Indeed, the Janus-face of *loyalty* of the farmer selling their produce, is *trust* in the buyer, which was lacking. The Ministry of Agriculture officer working on the island had just arrived from Sigatoka, the 'salad bowl' of Viti Levu, and compared that region's structured quota system and farmer registration which binds farmer-exporter in a mutually beneficial way: 'so they have that bond… rather than just three buyers competing for that price', as in Taveuni.

> Adi Kelera (Ministry of Agriculture): '*Some farmers they say it would be better if we just leave the dalo in the ground, let it wilt, rather than supplying it, because the first thing is that the*

[304] In this case of 'budgeted revelation' there is cause for this suspicion as the buyer's desire to sell their produce promptly is euphemised as the '*order is finished*' (see Lindstrom, 1991, p.120).

trust they have with the buyers; once the buyer says: okay, the price range will be just from 2-4 dollars, and then the price goes right down to 1 dollar, that's the first thing that the farmer says 'oh I don't trust this buyer eh', first we have to build trust.'

One way middlemen were judged in relation to notions of trust and loyalty was in their approach to rejects, those taro which came in undersized (less than 700g). The ultimate decision to accept or reject these 'rejects' is by the buyer at the farmgate; as rarely were bags of taro packed by the farmer themselves accepted, out of suspicion that some would 'sneak' in rejects. When the market was said to be 'flooded', as it was towards the end of my fieldwork, the price hovering around $2-2.50, most buyers did not buy 'rejects'. Undersized taro, the oft-referenced symbol of the soil's declining returns, are most often rejected and incorporated either into the kitchen or sent to family in the mainland. In this sense, *tausala* gets reintegrated back into the household subsistence economy, ceremonial subeconomy, and kin networks; but to request an exchange of *tausala* before this is the case – as one interlocutor in Suva had done of a family member on the island – could be met with a long silence (as noted in the previous chapter).

Lusi: 'Before when we pull the 10 bags, maybe 3 bags are rejects, before they were not buying. When Nilesh came, he bought this too from the farmers. Because of the sweat of the farmers, we have to take it eh - as an agent, as a businessman, as an exporter - we just go and take, the farmers are the ones who are sweating, sweating for it, 6 months or 7 months.'

The moral value, then, put by Lusi on Nilesh's business model that allowed the buying of undersized taro for their frozen products, infuses ethicality with economics. Indeed, it reflects the similar claims of the other two exporters to their particular emphasis on relationality; in TKDD's case against buyers who do not buy produce when the farmers 'really need it' (for example, during COVID), and in Robert's, his personal approach, an emphasis on 'caring for each other' over and above any business exchange. In Lusi's claim she emphasises the acceptance of 'rejects' in ethical terms; the other exporters part of a before when 'they were not buying'. The acceptance or rejection of 'rejects' did not only reflect on buyers' sense of ethical responsibility towards farmers but was also constitutive of the wider narrative of decline of soil fertility.

Rejection rates had been as high as 50% in the previous decade, as the effect of poor soil health after years of persistent chemical use and monocropping became clear to farmers, who were forced to move to higher up the mountain. Sam of TeiTei Taveuni's assertion that 'farmers usually calculate how much dalo to how much money they get' referred to farmers' calculations of *number* of dalo to money earnt. Thus, when I undertook surveys towards the end of my research, I found my metric – kilograms - for taro and yaqona harvested was often changed by respondents to number of plants or bags sold; the

weight of both being variable, which made weight but an estimation.[305] In addition, at the farmgate on only two occasions did I see a farmer or his family take note of the number of kilograms sold in their notebook. As Sam suggests, the approximation of weights as bags/plants results in a disconnect from yield that decreases as soil fertility decreases. Yield, and its direct correlate; money; are not the metric used for judging economic nor ecological sustainability. Instead, the ubiquity of bags sold/number of taro planted as metric means that many farmers cannot adequately predict their income, and adding further variability is the rejection of undersized taro.

When one is done blaming the soil (and oneself in their treatment of it), one turns to the rejector of that soil's output. Whether you believe in him or not, the form of hope on the island is the same as that which inspires suspicion: the middleman. In the next chapter I will explore the self-reflexive blame, complicity, and moralisation at play in farmers' treatment of the land, where visions of the past come to be used in oppositional ways to a present defined in terms of socio-ecological decline. In this chapter, my aim has been to explore the contemporary role that consumes (quite literally; 'the middleman is *eating* us') feelings of unpredictability within an opaque market. Indeed, in the entrepreneurial role's consumption of *uncertainty*, one can expect a resulting bifurcation of hope and suspicion. Where the middleman stands between past/present, inside/outside, farmer/consumer, they provide a unique vantage point from which to reflect back these hopes and suspicions of farmers. In this way, they offer both a vision of class-based unity (in farmers' suspicions towards them) but also incite such fervent belief (in farmers' hopes) that their own positionality is pushed to not only outside, but above *and* beyond the island in ways frequently discomforting for the middlemen themselves.

> *<u>Fieldnotes, in the truck, 5th January 2024</u>*
>
> *We head up to Matei to drop Noa off at the airport, she is going to Suva to see her kids and for her grandma's 90th birthday. At the airport the Tui Cakau comes and sits down behind us in the covered area adjacent to the airport (consisting of two offices; Fiji Link and Northern Star, and a canteen with some roti, drinks, and small souvenirs). Robert immediately goes and shakes his hand and helps with his luggage. The Tui Cakau gives Noa a kiss and his wife and her chat amicably, like old friends. Noa tells me her family is historically the 'mata-ni-vanua iloma' (the mata-ni-vanua 'inside'), meaning her family would be closest to the Chief, take care of his needs in the house, if he is sick they would care for him, feed him, and do domestic duties. That*

[305] Note: The use of *bags* as the metric probably has to do with the fact that freight charges on inter-island shipping companies are based on the number of bags, rather than weight. This also explains the frequent over-packing of bags.

is 'traditionally' speaking, she says, suggesting it is not the case anymore. The Tui Cakau is a commanding presence, and I recognised him from the TV, he is greeted warmly by the iTaukei who are there.

As we drive back to Wairiki, Robert tells me the Tui Cakau likes him and his wife; 'we do our own thing'. But he also stipulates he just likes helping old people; any old person he will help, like he did with Tui Cakau at the airport. 'He would give us land, but then what for?' he asks, and for a moment I think he wants a response. 'The big issue is land', he continues. He points to the foreshore, just outside Matei, and says one New Zealander just bought it for 1.5-2million, 'US dollars, I think'. Robert owns many pockets of land on the island. An old man had previously promised him a piece of land, and Robert started paying monthly instalments toward it. He did not really want or need it, and nor did he fully understand why the old man wanted him to have it. But when the old man died last year his last words, according to his wife, were 'remember Robert's land'. One day the man's wife came to him with an envelope, she wanted to eat duck: 'So I told her, point to any duck here, you can have it, cos I had ducks at that time. She took the duck and handed me the title. Inside the envelope was the title. What do you think of that? There's just some people you like, you like their ways, you like how they talk. And you can give, you can give. When you like somebody, you just give it. There are some very good people, they're poor people, I will always help them, I help them.'

[…]

Robert: 'He's good, this Tui Cakau. He thinks about everyone'.

J.S.: 'Is it a difficult job, do you think?'.

Robert: 'Very difficult, very, very, very difficult, because everybody wants something from him.

[The rain picks up outside and Robert's two employees in the back of the pick-up truck cover themselves with a poncho.]

They're looking for me, all the time. Some people… you see me, I do my prayer, I do my prayer in the morning, I do my prayer if I go somewhere, or I do my prayer – I do my prayer when I wake up – when I wake up I do my prayer. That's the first thing I do.

But I always tell the people over here, you know what – you people always pray first, pray first, say God's name, you people have to pray first – don't say Robert's name first.

Yes. That's what they do. They just wake up like this

"Hey we have to go and call Robert, we have to sell our thing to Robert", you know, "what if we ask Robert to – call Robert, what time's the boat coming and -" you know. They mention my name thousands of times, in a day.

I'm telling them, don't mention my name first. You people, pray first. Pray to God. No - you people just wake up, and you mention my name first. First thing in the morning, you people are mentioning my name.

You're gonna kill me man. Huh? God will be angry. Because you people are mentioning my name first. Then people laugh at me man.'

Robert's reflections on the Tui Cakau say a lot about his perspective on life in Taveuni, distinguishing himself and his wife as independent from 'everybody [who] wants something from him'. Where the Tui Cakau can give land, the middleman gives that which comes from the land; he is neither feudal overlord nor capitalistic exploiter in the Marxist sense, but the middleman's control over the flows of exports (as buyers often work to maintain an *undersupply*) and imports (money and goods), means he takes on a God-like position within the socio-economic framework of Taveuni. This position, though, is persistently rejected by the buyers who navigate complex racialised histories of exploitation and enduring socio-cultural obligations never far removed from distinctly economic exchange. As Robert laments: the farmers put the middleman where God used to be, and the market thus becomes imbued with a religiosity that inspires hope *and* fear. In turn, Robert aligns his interests with that of the community, not merely individualist gain, whilst chastising those who are haphazardly 'mentioning my name first'. The mystification between market and mutuality appears to blur another border: between the worldly and the divine. The resulting idolatry complicates an answer to Appadurai's (2024, p.100) original question, as the middleman remains an external entity to the community in so far as he is frequently a source of suspicion, but he is also internal, for he comes to re-define cultural and moral values in ways that increasingly discomfort even himself.

As the entrepreneurial spirit of Road King Farms continued to challenge previous arrangements, hope again pervaded the island; and with new economic structures comes new transparencies, such as the sight of dozens of iTaukei women spending all day processing taro in sheds near to their villages. However, it does not do away with the opacity of markets that have engendered a new political economy of knowledge that many lack and thus continues to elicit suspicion of back-channel dealings, agreements, and price-tampering. Taro farmers across villages, settlements, and racial identities, are bonded by common complaint, and daily seek a common name, whether *Fijian* or merely farmer. But, the middleman, who in yesteryear could be distanced as semi-feudal overlord, paternalistic exploiter, or just: *vulagi* (foreigner), is now resolutely *of* Taveuni. Whether iTaukei, Indo-Fijian, Kailoma, or other,

the culturally imbued economic strata of Taveuni includes that figure who balances hope and suspicion, and from whom; everybody wants *something*.

Conclusion

The tensions held by this socio-economic role are, I have suggested, indicative of the ways the past (middlemen as *alien*) and the present (middlemen as *Fijian*) entwine and provoke socio-moral responses to their internal-external boundary spanning work. In this way, they are both extensions and subversions of the oft-recited narrative of decline and iTaukei underdevelopment, wherein those forces historically external to the territory (for example, foreign merchant capital) are made internal (Fijian-owned export businesses). As this chapter has shown, self-conscious cultural appraisals offer frequent critiques of iTaukei development and suggest that inter-ethnic class consciousness remains stifled by the spatial differentiation across the island. Spatially, the village and the settlement symbolise dichotomous histories of land protectionism (in line with communalism) and plantation commercialism (in line with individualism). Where class-consciousness does arise, however, is within the everyday exchange where suspicions of collusive tactics between buyers emerge as binding tissue between farmers; complicating deterministic readings of race as exporters comprise both iTaukei and Indo-Fijians. Through intertwining historiography and reflexive ethnographic vignettes, I have argued that the middleman, as a socio-economic form within Taveuni, *consumes* histories which evoke the 'triumvirate' of state-capital-traditional power.[306] Therein, the spectrality of the role – as in part constituted (or *haunted*) by histories of economic exploitation - offers a metric for understanding contemporary 'antagonisms' that hold between not only racial groups, but also *within* iTaukei communities, and within the subjective experience of the middleman himself. The everyday exchange of taro, then, invokes deep temporal questions of past economic peripherality, and the middleman as *aspect* of this past; *and* of its potential subversion, frequently elides the past and present; suspicion and hope. In my interlocutors' reflections, however, they persist in trying to maintain the divide between their self-in-community and their role as middleman, keeping the past well *in the past*.

[306] Plange, 1990, p.20.

Chapter 4

'Spreading the gospel of not using chemicals': syncretic theologies of fertility and trajectories of decline

> *'Before, the land - the vanua - is associated with the Devil. We didn't see God where we are, we saw him in the Church… When the missionaries came, the Devil came… Until we go back, we will spray, because we don't see God in the land.'*
>
> - Fr. Isoa at Holy Cross Church, Wairiki, 31.10.2023

> *'All we've been trying to tell them: the land, the land, the land. The land is where you will earn everything. You have to maintain the land, and take care of it, and value it, because it will give you everything – your food, your money, your anything – you don't have to move away from here because you were going to look for food or money elsewhere, it's just here: right at your doorstep.'*
>
> - Liti, Course Coordinator at Tutu Rural Training School, 22.9.2023

Vanua theology

A statue of Mary, mother of Jesus, stands outside the Holy Cross Church, overlooking the grounds and the surrounding settlements. She was blessed on 8th December 1911 after a particularly bad tsunami had inspired the priest to erect a statue to protect the church; he said the next time the water should not pass Mary. In a ceremony of its consecration in the following year Our Lady of Lourdes (*Marama ni Lura*) was proclaimed: *Queen of Wairiki*. The current priest of Tutu Rural Training School, a farming training centre which many of the young men of Cakaudrove province pass through, Fr. Borosio, sits opposite me in the grounds of Tutu and tells me that Mary and the *vanua* have much in common.

> 'The *vanua* has a concern for its people. Mary – the church – has always had a concern for the people of God… We always see the *vanua* as feminine… The words used for the *vanua*; *solesolevaki* (communal labour); for example, those are feminine words, and its attributes are also of the character of Mary; having concern for others, that's the feminine part of it. Hospitality, peace, caring; these are the characters of Mary.
>
> […]
>
> In a patriarchal society like ours, you can be really pushed to live your masculine part, that's where there's always been oppression to other genders. In the Marian aspects of it, everyone is equal. And that's how the *vanua* has been designed - even though it's patriarchal – it's got that concern. You have the different roles, you have the chiefs, the warriors, these aspects have always been guided by the protection of the people; for the *bati* (warriors), you *guard*

> the chiefs, *guard* the people, from the enemies; so, you *guard*, you protect, you are giving your life for them, the sense of humility comes in. So, you need to govern all the aspects of Marian spirituality, as well as understand how the *vanua* functions, because otherwise someone can always see the *vanua* as an oppressive society. From our perspective it's not. You acknowledge the aspects of the *vanua* that have been embedded with love, caring; *vanua* always has the aspect of the concern of others, it's there. It's a Mum, it's like a mother who is to have a concern for its people.'

The ethnographic contribution of this chapter is suggestive of the ways in which land-based theologies are being employed within environmental discourses in Taveuni today, linking deep temporalities of engagement with foreign entities – missionary, colonial, agrochemical – with present environmental issues. I will argue that these entities are drawn on within an anti-chemical discourse that seeks change (or indeed, *going back*). This discourse, spearheaded by Tutu Rural Training Centre, combines three dialectics which will form the basis of this chapter's argument: Biblical, pre-colonial, and gendered readings of 'the chemical', as it is locally referred to. In combining Biblical and pre-colonial appraisals of the chemical, then, what is invoked is not a pre-missionisation past but rather the inherent connections between *being vakaturaga* (in the manner of a chief) and Marist principles. This syncretic *vanua*-centric theology, as Fr. Isoa and Fr. Borosio suggest above, is a continuation of the defining relationship within iTaukei society between the church (*lotu*) and the *vanua*.

The chemical, then, mediates this relationship anew; being framed as a mix of Biblical sin, modern excess, and masculinist control. It is this last part that speaks specifically to Tutu's audience; young male farmers who pass through its training courses yearly, who are at the nexus of diverging pulls within the wider frame of the market economy, trajectories of socio-ecological decline, and patriarchal norms. The equivalences drawn between the *vanua* and the feminist theology of Mary offers a challenge to contemporary forms of authority in iTaukei society, which – as Fr. Borosio suggests above – are misappropriations of traditional, feminine values. Tutu, in turn, proposes a feminist ecological discourse that refers to the *vanua*, an ostensibly patriarchal structure, in feminine terms, finding structural failures – of crops, health, relations - to be a factor of this mistaken identity.

In exploring the anti-chemical discourse, I hope to not only reflect the prevailing concerns of interlocutors who speak of declining soil fertility, but also to explore the ways in which chemical *critique* offers a vantage from which to investigate notions of Fijian power. The central notion of fertility as defining of power in iTaukei society is indicative of the moral ecology of the traditional polity. Moral ecologists' analytic study of the re-ascription of traditional practices has, in previous chapters, been

applied to the topics of land boundaries and exchange practices.[307] In this chapter it becomes focused on indigenous forms of environmentalism that, rather than being defined by previous acts of *dispossession*, come about through *continuous* occupation of land (indeed, the overuse of much of this land). Individuals in this chapter frequently seek redress to their soil troubles in calling on the pre-colonial and Biblical past; in short, a time *before the chemical*. Instead, then, of a *bounded* principle of conservation, the focus lies in the *boundlessness* of forms; the mother, the land, and the chemical, and draws on all three to synthesise Marist and *vanua*-centric theologies into an *anti*-chemical discourse.

Fertility is a central feature of chiefly (*vakaturaga*) power, this group having: 'such excessive fertile power that people were careful not to touch them or to eat their leftover food, lest they swell up or become pregnant'.[309] That fertility is understood as sacred means that chiefs, like women, are both revered and feared, evidenced by twinned worship and taboo protocols.[310] Their ability to be productive, as in the commonly referred to trait of a chief: 'When they speak, it happens' (Pela), suggests that fertility – in oppositional ways to a masculinist virility – is not power that requires exertion to be enacted; they need *only* speak (said differently: it is their *mana*). Indeed, when I enquired if the Tui Vuna could ban use of inorganic chemicals on his land, this point was made clear to me by Liti: 'the banning [of chemicals] is not important', but rather: 'the understanding of the reason why' is. This approach points to a less top-down, hierarchical view of enacting social change amongst farmers, derived from a *vanua*-centric understanding of interconnectivity.

The interplay between patriarchy and feminine values has been explored by ethnographers Toren (1988) and Ryle (2010) in the common sight of da Vinci's The Last Supper in Fijian Methodist households. Finding divergent visions of Fijian power, in one aspect it evokes hierarchical ideas as suggested in its spatiality, central figure, and the social invisibility of women. However, in an inverted interpretation of this same image; Jesus' subservience whilst serving his disciples is foregrounded (and in a Fijian variation of the image, it is kava being served). As one of Ryle's interlocutors remarks: '[t]hat was the earlier concept of the chiefly system in Fiji. It was unfortunately taken out when power came into it'.[311] In this interpretation Jesus is '*turaga nei kaisi*' (chief of the servers), and a truer analogue to

[307] See Campbell, 2017, Griffin et al., 2019.
[309] Kaplan, 1995, p.108. Note: Sahlins (1981, p.109, pp.118-121) notes that in the chief's installation there is the conscious consumption and appropriation of the land's 'reproductive powers' through the drinking of *yaqona* and wearing of *masi* (barkcloth): 'The chief's accession is mediated by the object that saliently signifies women', and the loincloth the *penetrator* (stranger-chief) wears *conceals* the primary site of male power, making for 'a contradiction in the chief's appropriation'. Sayes (1982, pp.18-19) also notes the forbiddance of touching the Tui Cakau or objects touched by him, which could manifest in 'swelling' of that part of the body which had contacted the chief.
[310] Kivi, 2018, p.112.
[311] Ryle, 2010, p.19.

authentic Fijian authority than that of the corruptive aspect of *power*. Tomlinson (2015, p.84) comments on the co-constitutive relationship between the church and the *vanua*:

> *'The vanua's patriarchal aspects and tendencies make it both less Christian and less authentically Fijian than it should be, and the masculine ideal of chiefliness is based on feminine values.'*

As Fr. Borosio suggests above, the divide between *idealised* feminist values and *actual* patriarchal society can re-produce oppressive modes of being within a wider masculinist socio-ecological model. Referring to the land as *mother*, then, reverts a process of vilification referred to by Fr. Isoa; 'Until we go back, we will spray, because we don't see God in the land'. The land as 'mother' is a notion found across the Pacific, which as Huffer and Tui Rakuita (2008, p.10) state, is part of lands' confounding dualism between 'boundedness' and the idea that 'like a mother, [it] cannot be possessed'. Kivi (2018), in his study of eco-Marian principles in Fiji, also notes Mary's role as Mother with a focus on care, linking it to the notion of *vanua* as garden. Her two other main identities as Virgin (of soil) and Queen (of earth) offer the varied ways Mary is to inspire individuals through healing a 'broken' *vanua*. The re-inscription of the *vanua*, thus, in maternal, virginal, and queenly terms points to its gendered balancing with an 'almighty father' that correspondingly gives fertile agency to both chief and commoner, man and woman, through – rather than in spite of – traditional structures, that have ostensibly silenced the feminine.

Toren (1999b) argues that Fijian society, as fundamentally dualistic, relies on the balance between hierarchy and equality in defining both self and society, thus making the *chief* but one side of a traditional balance:

> *'The logic of Fijian social relations, of the relations between the land and sea, husband and wife, brother and sister, cross-cousins, mother's brother and sister's children, commoner and chief, is always a twofold logic where hierarchy and equality are in tension with one another and dependent on one another for their very continuity' (p.178).*

Within the fundamental organising unit of the household itself, the interplay of hierarchy/equality is enacted through time; as in the beginning of a marriage a wife's 'own fertility is implicitly sacrificed' to the land of her husband, wherein she sources sustenance from the fertility of his ancestors. Only as she ages does this hierarchical relationship soften, even whilst it is said to be ever-present, and becomes more equal with her husband.[312] In pre-colonial society, endemic warfare promoted the

[312] Toren, 1999b, p.174.

hierarchical aspect of Fijian society (in the form of powerful war chiefs), but in the colonial-era as political stability became the norm, the 'dual nature of [Fijians'] values' could be asserted 'to show that balanced reciprocity and competitive equality are as salient, and as important, as tribute and hierarchy'.[313] Kivi (2018, p.134) asserts that tribal warfare made societal focus on the masculine obvious and necessary, but that modern *turagaism* (oppressive indigenous authority) cynically employs notions of indigenous paramountcy and militarism (exhibited especially by the 1987 and 2000 coups) which extends this form of masculinised, hierarchical oppression to the post-colonial period. Where hierarchy and equality are not balanced, the reflection of this imbalance is often cited in the land.

Interlocutors frequently commented that the *isevu* (first offering of crops) was no longer done in villages, which had previously been undertaken to both show respect to the chief *and* to ensure a good harvest; the entwinement of two kinds of fertility that connects chief and commoner, God and land. This loss of ritual practice could just as often reflect poorly on the *people* as showing a lack of respect (and in turn impacting the fertility of the land) as it could the *chief* (and in a manner of speaking, reflecting poorly on the fertility of the polity). A lack of balanced reciprocity and competitive equality (or indeed, a feeling of undue hierarchy and political contestation) could well be cited as reason for a breakdown of this bind. However, it could just as commonly be deemed an inevitable effect of individualism that put emphasis on household productivity over communal, tributary, and ritual practices. In this sense, farmers privilege the immediate family, and possibly the church (offering *isevu* to the priest, for example), but not to the wider polity.

Having established an underlying tension regarding the *nature* of *power* in the iTaukei village, I will now move on to discuss the rise of agrochemical use within this socio-moral landscape. I will focus this chapter on those who Tutu similarly focuses on; the young male farmers who will farm Taveuni's soils and control its traditional polity for the coming decades, who are subject to the pulls of *belonging* and *individualism*, and with whom the *chemical question* intersects with competing visions of the good life. I will briefly trace a history of chemicals, following the flows of information across colonial archives, early-planters' diaries, and wider literatures of engagement with chemicals – through nuclear testing and agricultural development - in the Pacific to arrive at the present day with knapsacks full of pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides ready to answer the call of the burgeoning taro industry of the late-1990s. In the second half, this chemical history will be diluted with the voices of interlocutors, who produce dichotomous narratives of 'the chemical', suggestive of both its role in taming and

[313] Toren, 1999b, p.178.

turning productive the 'Garden' of the Garden Island and, inversely, of stripping not only the *garden* of its Edenic qualities, but also the *Garden Islander* of their original innocence.

The 'chemical question', thus, comprises temporalities that stretch, elongate, compress, and foreshorten 'costs and benefits' in ways that draw on a wider set of references than a mere dichotomy between ecological impacts and monetary gain (a classic way of the land/way of money dichotomy). I will explore local moral discourses to show how ecological moralisation is inflected with evangelising rhetoric that seeks to redefine farmers' relationship to land and to the power held by and through it. In the first dialectic, the choice to use or not use chemicals assumes a Biblical equivalence between *temptation* and *faith*. The second draws on pre-colonial indigenous communal labour arrangements (*solesolevaki*) in contrast to the chemical framed as constitutive of modernity's *excesses*. In the last, focus will be on the gendered aspect of farmwork and, therein, of the chemical, to explore the varied mis/alignments of the feminist theology of Mary and the *vanua* in its *idealised* and *actual* forms.

Chemo-ethnography: defining the field

Chemicals in their tangible form belie deep logics of the political and economic conditions that promote their use, which I will explore both historically and in contemporary discourse. Different disciplines have addressed pesticide use in various ways, encircling the perceptions, narratives, hopes, and intentions that drive their use amongst farmers. The approaches these disciplines have taken largely fall into one of two categories: structuralist (highlighting the political and economic factors that promote their use) or individualist (focusing on the agency of farmers, viewed as *homo economicus*).[314] The literature then posits pesticide use as either an effect of structural violence across colonial and post-colonial settings, or a factor of farmers' limited knowledge - often obscured by state or private enterprise - of toxicity and health. This anti-dialogical separation of the recent past and the contemporary offers only a partial view to investigate the manifold narratives that attach to the use of chemicals.

Hetherington's (2013, 2020) ethnography of cotton smallholder *(campesinos)* in Paraguay, faced with an ever-expanding soy frontier, is instructive here. His interlocutors use the Guarani word for 'medicine' when speaking of pesticides, he adds: 'but the medicine was also structural, with the state increasingly dependent on these chemicals to maintain power', in a relationship that highlights the connection between agricultural production and political stability.[315] As the Paraguayan state's priority

[314] Hu, 2020, p.16.
[315] Hetherington, 2020, p.690.

shifts to soy, so too does *campesinos'* relationship to pesticides; once reliant on chemical subsidies that have been taken away, they align themselves with environmental activists and are newly framed not by their productive capacity but by their corporeal vulnerability to pesticide drift and illness. In this way, the *campesinos* become *part pest*, a life form deemed anti-modern, weed-like, and irrational. The dual re-definition of *campesinos* and *chemicals* within the national framework highlights the importance of both contemporary discursive alignments (as, for example, between peasants, environmentalists, international NGOs) *and* the historical projects chemicals have supported to highlight the ethnographic, political, and historical centrality of food production in defining rural identities.

Whilst studies of pesticides have spanned the globe, the need to address a specifically Oceanian response to chemicals is paramount as the living memory of destructive chemicals is prevalent.[316] Much of the framing of the Pacific Islands in the history of modern science has been one epitomised by victimhood: from nuclear testing ground to climate change's 'canary in the coalmine'.[317] These framings are valid, justified, and necessary to illuminate structural violence. However, they also obscure 'deeply rooted and emerging'[318] Oceanian modernities, and in turn the 'variety of ways to make claims of rationality and progress that constitute the modern' in different cultural contexts.[319] Following agrochemicals then, through the colonial projects they were introduced to support, and contemporary reliance on chemicals for export market competitiveness, is a way to balance the macro structures that sustain pesticide dependence with the local discourses of their various use, misuse, and abandonment. In this way, farmers navigate the agrochemical terrain by negotiating use/non-use across multiple discourses, assuming agency therein, and drawing on visions of the past and future in frequently emancipatory modes.

In most studies of pesticide use, *ambivalence* is cited as the primary feeling amongst farmers who are at once aware of the risks of pesticide use and deem its continuing use to be a necessity.[321] Widger (2014), in his ethnographic work in Sri Lanka, has highlighted the way in which ambivalence is literally *consumed* by drinkers of *kasippu*, which is made by hovering a bottle of pesticides above a fermenting drink, ostensibly to add some of the chemical's potency to the mixture in the form of vapours. In this way, the risks of pesticide contamination and 'benefits' of added intoxication are part of drinkers' 'roulette', the act of its consumption (and hopeful survival) going some way in mediating the sense of

[316] See Stein and Luna, 2021, Grandia, 2022, Willemin and Backhaus, 2023.
[317] See Dreher and Voyer, 2014, Farbotko, 2010, Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012, Kelman, 2018, Lazrus, 2012.
[318] Tambridge, D'Arcy, and Mawyer, 2021, p.351.
[319] Thomassen, 2012, p.167.
[321] Hu, 2020, p.16, Poli and Fontefrancesco, 2024, p.723.

anxiety defining of ambivalence, being itself 'a condition of modernity' and a 'necessary corollary of social order', allowing critique and change to occur.[322]

In instances of *self-poisoning*, Widger (2018) argues that the material availability of pesticides and poison-ingestion's role as a cultural, communicative practice reframes pesticides as both a means *and* cause of suicide.[323] In the Fijian context, in the ritual practice of ascension the chief is 'symbolically poisoned' with *yaqona* by the local people, allowing for his spiritual rebirth.[324] In more quotidian poisonings, the second-most common method of suicide in Fiji was ingestion of *paraquat*, a factor of its availability in rural settings, until its ban in 2020.[325] In the village setting, fears that interpersonal phenomena – jealousy, spite, retribution – will result in poisoning are persistent and commonplace. In one instance, sitting around the grog bowl, a man told me the story of a girl whose 21st birthday was held in Suva. People from her village came to the gathering, and when she started to eat, her tongue swelled up and she died. When the villagers got back to the village, the girl's father did not want to let them come back in; knowing that one of them, but not which one, had killed his daughter. In all these instances, the ambivalence of the object consumed (whether pesticide, *yaqona*, or foods) is maintained within a social context that allows poisoning to be either generative (of spiritual rebirth), ameliorative (of settling scores), or destructive (of life).

In Taveuni, sensing of the ill-effects of chemicals on water pollution, soil erosion, and health produces, predictably, a similar feeling of ambivalence about pesticide use in a socio-economic setting that many farmers view as delimiting of choice. Indeed, chemo-ethnography finds that chemical use is frequently a method of risk-*aversion*, highlighting that, whether they are good/bad in respect to health, chemicals are framed as necessary to lower other, more prevalent risks.[326] Complicating notions of 'devilish' chemicals is the fact that the same chemicals have, for many farmers, replaced the need for labour (which may not exist) or long-hours of hand-weeding, reflecting a 'chemical kinship' that makes '*good kinship with "bad" kin*'.[327] This *kinning* of chemicals reflects, following Schneider (1953), a social rather

[322] Widger, 2018, p.407.
[323] Ibid., p.403.
[324] Sahlins, 1981, p.109.
[325] Ministry of Agriculture, 2020. Note: whilst recent statistics are lacking, Fiji shared a feature of rural, low-income settings elsewhere, wherein access to highly toxic pesticides has, since at least the late-1970s, been a leading method of suicide (Mathieu et al., 2021). In reviews on suicide in Fiji (Henson et al., 2012, Gogoi, 2023), female Indo-Fijians between the ages of 15-30 were found to be the highest risk group, as well as youth, a factor suggestive of social disintegration. That a non-indigenous group has higher suicide rates is anomalous in the global literature on formerly colonised countries, and points to factors of socio-cultural pressure, feelings of insecurity, and/or lack of belonging amongst Indo-Fijians (Gogoi, 2023, p.60). Research on poison-ingestion as a communicative cultural act in Fiji is lacking (see Aghanwa, 2001 for some treatment of non-fatal motivations).
[326] Poli and Fontefrancesco, 2024, p.725.
[327] Balayannis and Garnett, 2020, p.6.

than progenerative reading of kinship, in which the 'reservoir' of potential labour (in the form of variously active or inactive reciprocal relations that establish kinship) is replaced by a 'reservoir' of chemicals. The words of one of Luna's (2020) interlocutors in Burkina Faso suggests this concretely: 'pesticides are our *children* now'. Chemicals have also, importantly, provided farmers with risk-averting strategies that address some of the concerns addressed in previous chapter, for example: market impacts (which had led some to diversify their income and spend less time on the farm), stealing (spraying reducing the harvest time thus lowering the chance of your crop being taken), and overreliance on labour (farmers complaints that labourers would either not turn up for work or do poor work).

Thus, keeping in balance the macro (structural) and micro (agentic) aspects of pesticide use, I aim to centre the internalised tension that many farmers feel in using chemicals. This tension, as Stein and Luna (2021, p.89) say:

> *'brings attention to the set of affective states and phenomenology in the context of toxic worlds where injurious chemicals may be simultaneously feared and desired'.*

The destructive (weedkiller) and generative ('clean' farms) potential of agrochemicals draws in past projects of hope and farmers' modern projects of aspiration. As Miri told me looking back: '*We loved to use chemicals'*. That agrochemicals have played a central, often positive part in people's lives should not be obscured, for it is within the tension produced by pesticide's *generative* and *destructive* power that enduring questions about viable and desirable futures rise to the surface. Farmers on the 'chemical treadmill',[328] where chemical use begets further intensification as a result of lock-in and deskilling, are increasingly aware of the trade-offs inherent in this 'treadmill of production' that seemingly offers increasing income with increasing use of pesticides.[329] Indeed, as Rudiak-Gould (2013, p.178) explores in his ethnography of climate change in the Marshall Islands, the 'paradoxical state at the heart of risk perception' is such that even counter-discourses 'loathe and love the threat', because it endangers – and thus reifies – something 'fragile and dear'. Indeed, in my context what is 'considered fragile and dear' is the island ('all the richness has gone away'), and its inhabitants themselves. A common view amongst older folks especially was that people were getting sicker:

> *Mosese: 'Before, our old people die of old age, now they die of sickness…they could live to one hundred plus…because of what you put here every day, before they eat organic, all natural' (motioning his hand to his mouth).*

[328] Hu and Rahman, 2016.
[329] Hedlund et al., 2020, p.522.

Seba: 'People are getting older much faster'.

Peni: 'Telling us that some people die at 40, 50, average age is 70, age is going down. Tell us why these people die at 40 and 50?'

Whilst toxic exposure tests are lacking in Taveuni, correlations between use of chemical herbicides and chronic disease have been identified amongst sugarcane farmers in Viti Levu,[330] as well as widely across agrarian literature.[331] Self-reporting levels of sickness amongst farmers is generally low, though common effects of pesticide exposure - headaches, rashes, and breathing issues – easily evade attribution. More conspicuously, however, this evasion can be explained by a general aversion to speaking about oneself in negative terms that contrasts with patriarchal, rural ideals of health, vitality, and strength. Instead, increasing sickness was almost always spoken about euphemistically or, more commonly, at a distance: the middle-aged neighbour who died on his fishing boat, the friends of a friend, the notion that there are fewer old people in the villages; all of this maintained a rhetorical distance between sickness and the speaker, but implicitly suggested systemic problems of community health.

Whilst few of my interlocutors directly pointed to the chemical as a cause of these sicknesses and were often more likely to point the finger at modern diets, the health risks of consuming food sprayed with chemicals was commonly cited as reason enough to eat crops grown in gardens closer to the village. In gardens, sprays were used far less or not at all, a factor of the widely held conception of consubstantiality between the body and that which is ingested; in this sense, *proximity* to one's home aided the sense of risk reduction and reduced chemical exposure. An oft-repeated anecdote about people returning to the village during Covid and becoming fit and healthy (rural vitality contrasting with urban diets), here appears in an even more localised contrast, between *sprayed* farm and *organic* garden.

In defining the chemo-ethnographic scene, I hope to have highlighted the social and bodily ambivalences surrounding chemicals and their impacts. As the Fiji Pesticides Act (1971) is undergoing review currently (as of 2024), exploring the bodily tensions of employing pesticides to *destroy* and to *generate* offers policymakers a more holistic vision of the interplay between structure and agency. I will now turn to the history of the chemical in Fiji to parse out the macro-projects and ideological visions of colonial-era development before setting out the emerging dialectics of the anti-chemical discourse.

[330] Szmedra, 1999.
[331] For example, developmental impacts on children exposed to chemicals in Mexico (Mann, 2000) and health impacts on farmers in Kenya (Waltz, 2020).

Chemo-coloniality: using one land to grow another

Chemo-coloniality, which historically entwines chemical dependence and colonial endeavour, is entangled in notions of fertility: using *one land* to grow *another*. Indeed, the economic development goals of colonies rely on the logics of the 'agricultural treadmill', an entwinement of a policy-technology model of development, which motivates – and measures - increased use of pesticides. A recent study has shown that pesticide use and economic development globally are positively correlated, and that decreasing rural population (on account of urbanisation) does not lead to a decrease in pesticide use but its opposite; as less labour-intensive and more capital-intensive methods of agricultural production are retained.[332] Pesticides, it is clear, pose persistent questions that must be dealt with through a macro (economic, political, historical) and micro (localised, moral landscape) lens. To do this I will briefly detail chemo-colonial beginnings.

In the post-WW2 era, pesticides and fertilisers began to proliferate across plantation colonies, including Fiji. The Fiji Director of Agriculture wrote to the Colonial Secretary in 1955:

> *'In its broadest sense there is a tradition of conforming to natural limitations rather than towards control of environment [in Fiji]. This is reflected in a reluctance to capitalise farming operations such as by the purchase of spray equipment… it is assumed [by the Director of Agriculture] that the control of pests, diseases, and weeds is an economic agricultural objective'.*[333]

Chemicals thus first began to appear in Taveuni when 'the importance of fertiliser application to the future of Colonial agriculture' became policy.[334] To encourage local farmers' uptake of chemicals, extension staff at the Ministry of Agriculture began to decouple the idea that only by planting additional land can greater agricultural output be achieved.[335] Linking economic growth and chemical control was a new global logic which produced dependencies underpinned by technologies of growth. The journey of these chemicals from military use – for example, DDT used to make the Pacific 'safe' for US soldiers from typhus and organophosphates used as nerve gases on humans – to the 'war on weeds' happened quickly but was not without precedent. Indeed, the notion of nature as a battlefield that had begun with Bacon and Darwin, took on added resonance in wartime when the idea of 'war as pest control, pest control as war' was deployed for practical purposes, reframing war-as-moral-dilemma

[332] Ward, 1993.
[333] NAF, F2/360/1 - D4/1.
[334] NAF, F2/277.
[335] By 1952, Fiji was importing over four-thousand tons of sulphate of ammonia, primarily from Britain, which was used for cane sugar, whilst other manures (superphosphate, blood and bone) were being imported at around a rate of one-thousand tons/year in the early-1950s, which was predominantly used for market gardens and dairy lands (Ibid).

into war-as-moral-virtue under the logic of humans' *duty* to dominate nature.[336] As ideas and technologies passed between civilian and military spheres, the common factor was an enemy – whether human or otherwise - that did not respect *boundaries*.[337] Agriculture and war, then, were not the polar opposites suggested by many, including the colonialist quoted in Chapter 2 who framed the 'evidences of war' as 'anathema to the cultivator', but instead intertwined aspects of scientific, institutional, and metaphorical projects of development.[338] Anna Tsing labelled the new post-WW2 'Green Revolution' packaging – in the spirit of 'atoms for peace': 'explosives for peace' (fertilisers) and 'poisons for peace' (pesticides).[339] Being both explosive and poisonous is part of what constitutes the object of chemo-ethnography's many faces: it is both productive and destructive, constantly in a process of rhetorical slippage between trajectory analyses that posit it as both *result* and *cause* of present-day environmental issues on the island.

The post-WW2 era's scrambling for agrochemicals across the colonies offers a fascinating glimpse into the ideology of fertility and destruction. International fertiliser trade in the Pacific post-WW2 continued a history of agricultural links in the region: first of regional guano to Australia and New Zealand and, in the late-19th to early-20th century, the trade of phosphorus from the Gilbert, Ellis, and Marshall Islands. In Fijian soils in the 1950s, a 'general deficiency of available phosphates'[340] and 'notorious' deficiency in lime was found.[341] Phosphate fertilisers and lime, thus, were seen as essential to the agricultural economy of Fiji, and in the wider sense to the advancement of the colony. Whilst liming could be achieved by the application of local coral sand, phosphorous fertiliser had to be sourced externally and thus began a protracted attempt by the Colonial Secretariat in Fiji to import phosphate rock from Nauru, Ocean Island (Banaba), and Christmas Island. The story of Fiji's ill-fated attempt to divert some phosphate from these Pacific Island sources is laid out in increasingly frustrated internal letters held at the National Archives Fiji, which highlights the role of the British Phosphate Commission (BPC) in creating phosphate supply silos (designed to supply the UK, Australia, and New Zealand with fertiliser) that made it hard for small islands states to acquire phosphates. It also makes clear the preference of the Colonial Secretary in Fiji to funnel fertilisers into the country through 'ordinary commercial channels'; with small firms stocking small amounts (rather than a government-organised scheme, even if they admit procurement might be easier in this manner),[342] and the

[336] Russell, 1996, p.1509.
[337] Ibid., p.1517.
[338] Ross, 1910, p.44. See also Page (2016) on wartime/peacetime nitrogen fixation in Britain and its role in imperialism.
[339] Tsing, 2019, p.29. Note: Developed by US scientists to defoliate Japan food crops, chlorophenoxy herbicide 2,4-D remains the most widely used pesticide by volume in the world (Szmedra, 1999, p.84).
[340] NAF, F2/277.
[341] Ibid.
[342] NAF, F.9/1-3.

increasing discomfort of the Colonial office in Suva over 'our small requirement […] creating a deal of fuss out of proportion to its importance'.[343]

The BPC commissioners are found to be 'unreasonable' over their refusal to supply Fiji with adequate supplies of fertilisers, and the British government's lack of support is lamented 'since it is the UK's declared policy to encourage the use of artificial fertilisers in increasing the economic output of the colonial territories'.[344] The plight of Fiji's colonial officials to obtain Banaba's rock shows not only the essential abiding logic of agricultural expansion across the Colony, but also the hierarchy within the Colony. In a letter deriding the BPC's stranglehold on fertilisers, however, the Director of Agriculture adds a positive note; that local merchants are beginning to stock European suppliers of fertilisers (nitrofoka and double superphosphate), and the extent of the trade has been so great that 'the firm is already enlarging its storage space'.[345]

In 'Consuming Ocean Island', Teresia Teaiwa (2014) provides the mirror view from an island which provided colonial countries with fertiliser: Banaba in Kiribati, where phosphate mining took place between 1900 to 1980. Teaiwa, of part-Banaban descent herself, incisively describes the island being used as fertiliser for other lands; displacing not only people (to Rabi, off Taveuni's north-western coast, once Banaba became largely uninhabitable) but also displacing the very ground on which people lived. The multi-scalar movements of peoples, rocks, and ideologies, for Teaiwa: 'resonates with…indigenous Pacific understanding of and approach to time and place'.[346] Indeed, chemicals, once part of colonial economic development policy, are now intrinsically a part of socio-cultural life in Taveuni. Going further than local internalisation, chemicals – on account of their mobility and (in)visibility – produce 'chemosocial' solidarities as the conspiring (breathing *together*) of their vapours drifting across the island brings individuals together into one chemo-body, reconfiguring ways of knowing, being, and social relations.[347] In this way, they are increasingly called on as cause of myriad problems on the island which implicates *all* farmers in a transcorporeality that transgresses land tenure patterning that, ostensibly, facilitated an individualistic agricultural world. Their material and symbolic worlds then, attach to long histories of attraction to fertility, but are also intertwined with histories of its inverse: revulsion.

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[343] NAF, F2/277. Note: Indeed, a few months later the Agricultural Commerce and Industries Officer wrote that their enquiry had drawn unwanted attention to what are deemed 'irregular' shipments of fertiliser from Australia to the Colonial Sugar Refining company, and 'no doubt, future shipments will be watched and the limit enforced…it seems in this case there is some danger that we can "go further and fare worse"' (Ibid).
[344] NAF, F.9/1.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Teaiwa, 2014, xvi.
[347] Shapiro and Kirksey, 2017, pp.482-85.

Taveuni's paradox: of paradisical fertility and wild *untamed* fecundity, meant early planters, missionaries, and colonisers simultaneously reviled, feared, and sought influence over 'the bush'. James Valentine Tarte (n.d.), one of the first European settlers in Taveuni, wrote in the vein of both attraction and revulsion:

> *'I found Moore and Logan in a little clearing and Hamilton and Wilson next. All were cotton growing where the thick bush was cut down but where it was not there were heavy trees and dense bush to the water's edge… We could not see much but very good soil, with a huge mass of trees and scrubs'*[348]

The bush was often understood as a fertile place for traditional spiritual practices.[349] Padma Lal, the pre-eminent expert on mangroves in Fiji, posited that the cultural fear of these inter-tidal zones had much to do with their darkness and impenetrability, a reflection of the often thick vegetation of the interior.[350] In my time staying in Vuna *veikau* ('the bush' outside of Vuna village), I was often met with incredulity: *'Are you not scared?'*

Whilst in the period 1950s-1990s there remained low levels of pesticide use in Taveuni, it was in the mid-1990s – with the twinned impacts of long-term sugar cane land leases in neighbouring islands expiring and the rise of the taro export industry - that large amounts of chemicals came on to the island. Many former cane farmers from neighbouring Vanua Levu, who had long received subsidised fertilisers such as NPK, brought these across by the ton and sold them very cheaply to locals (see Figure 10). At the same time the taro industry was burgeoning on account of the fall of the Samoan export market in 1993; and as Mosese put it, this led to a confluence of arrivals; 'when the *tausala* (the export type of taro) comes, the chemical comes. If the *tausala* doesn't come, no chemicals!' After a few years of planting, farmers began to notice a difference as over fifty percent of their crop were classified as 'rejects' (less than 750 grams): 'we knew we had a problem, but most of us did not know what was the problem' (Sam from TeiTei Taveuni). The use of chemicals then and now is especially prevalent in the south of the island where large estates were subdivided in the post-colonial era into freehold and leasehold blocks allowing the influx of Indo-Fijian cane farmers to buy and lease land, the leased land being widely acknowledged as that which experiences highest levels of chemical use by both iTaukei and Indo-Fijians.

[348] Tarte, n.d., p.21.
[349] See Nicole, 2010 and Kaplan, 1995.
[350] Talk by Dr Padma Lal at the University of the South Pacific, 10 May 2023.

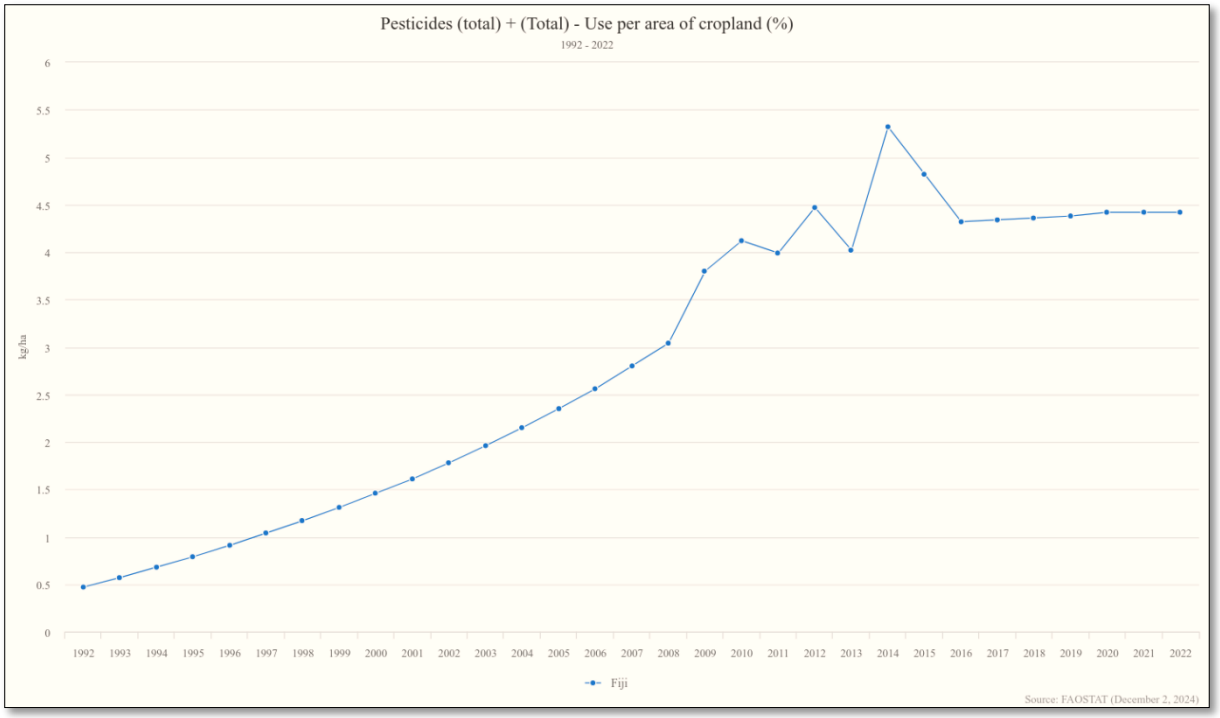

Figure 10. Graph of the use of pesticides in Fiji (1992-2022), measured in use per area of cropland. These figures are derived from pesticide imports. Unit: Kg/ha. Source: Food and Agriculture Organisation, https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/?#data/RP/visualize.

Presently, chemicals such as *glyphosate, diquat, za, rainbow* are sold in shops in the central commercial hub of Naqara township, Wairiki (Meridian Hardware Store) and South Taveuni Shopping Centre. Local NGO TeiTei Taveuni and Tutu rural training school provide some supplies of organic compost and liquid fertiliser. A recent review by the Registrar at the Ministry of Agriculture in Koronivia Research Station found compliance with pesticide storage and sale regulations in Taveuni shops to be 'very bad'. In the majority of cases, lacking was any of the precautions that were required for sale: chemicals should be out of reach and under lock and key with an entry door notice in the part of the shop where the chemicals are held, hands should be washed after handling containers, and a fan should be functioning for circulation. Despite these infractions, a 'soft handed' approach is preferred by the Registrar, a tacit indication that the sale of chemicals in these remote areas is too vital to farmers' livelihoods to infringe on in any great way.

The prevailing view, as suggested by interlocutors throughout this thesis, is one of declining soil fertility. Despite this, only twelve farmers stated their soil had been tested in previous years and of these, seven either did not get the results or did not remember getting them. Only one farmer had their own device for soil testing, having bought it from Suva, though he despondently said he had not used it since 2020 as crop disease had led to him abandoning commercial farming to focus on seafood exports. This gap in soil data is plugged locally with many references to the declining size of taro both

in the farm and in the market; the old kind referred to as *'ciwi tutu'* (those needing to be stood up to peel) almost entirely gone, and export 'rejects' (those crops less than 750g) increasingly common. Out of twenty-two farmers I surveyed, sixteen currently used chemical pesticides, typically glyphosate to initially clear a patch for planting ('it kills the weed right to the root') then employing diquat for 'cleaning' every 2-4 months of the 6-7 month taro growth stage, with *za* being used as needed for getting rid of para grass and store grass.[351] Out of the six farmers who did not use chemicals, four were not currently selling taro (all four of these were in the central region of the island near to Tutu, and in proximity of Holy Cross Parish's land which had initiated a ban on chemical use, and were either retired, supported by family, or had other sources of income, for example, small-scale virgin coconut oil production). This data suggests the central role of chemicals and commercialisation. The remainder of this section will focus on the etic and emic 'costs and benefits' of use of the chemical, as framed by my interlocutors for whom contemporary assessments of fertility remain of foremost importance, with reference to three main dialectics which are employed within the chemical discourse to explain its use and non-use.

Interlude / past as present / chemical remembrance

It is the end of August and there are over four-hundred people marching through the main streets of Suva, from the flea market to Albert Park. A large sign overhead reads: 'No Dumping of Fukushima Nuclear Waste Water in the Pacific Ocean!' Others, smaller, read:

> *Our Island is Not a Dumping Site / Our Ocean, Our Home / Wake up Pacific leaders / Pacific Ocean, Pacific Life / Stop Nuclear Waste Dump in Pacific / What will happen to our beautiful beaches? / Dump it in Tokyo! Keep It Japan! / Pacific Lives Matter.*

The protest against Japan's plans to dump treated nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean is the first large scale protest in Fiji in around sixteen-years, since the end of the Bainimarama leadership which all but banned public protest.[352]

'Japan! Japan! Japan! I am angry! How dare you?', a member of one Civil Society Organisation, screams into a megaphone. It is repeated by the hundreds gathered.

[351] Some farmers do employ organic fertiliser as soil remediation, for example, TeiTei Taveuni mix, homemade woodchips, chicken/goat waste, urea, fish meal, cocolly, or if there is available land employing rest periods.
[352] This was how the protest was widely reported in local media, though an annual protest organised by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre 'Reclaim the Night March' had taken place for many years, including this same year, 2023, during the previous administration, corresponding with International Women's Rights Day. Whether this was not considered a 'protest', or reports were wilfully ignorant of this fact I do not know.

'That's my best fish', one lady says, as the speaker gets to 'kawakawa' on her list of all the species that will be affected by the dump. 'We love our fish!' the speaker screams. We lay on the ground, a 'die-in'.

At one point all the cameras and local media turn and move to the outskirts of the rally where the former Prime Minister lurks, being disallowed by police from joining the protest.

The speaker now up, Reverend James Bagwan, says Fiji should not be bought off by 'chequebook diplomacy', Japan being one of Fiji's biggest development donors. A Japanese warship recently docked at Suva port, the sailors on board spent a day planting mangroves at a nearby village.

The protesters begin to disperse, and the cooler August airs wash through the city, Suva bay, across the ocean, all the way to the other side of the Pacific where nuclear wastewaters sit, ready to begin pouring into the ocean this weekend. The frustration dealt by the simultaneous proximity and distance to this body of water and to islander's inability to influence its fate is succinctly put in a letter to the Fiji Times the next day:

> *'Scientific evidence indicate that the discharged wastewater met international safety standards. Pacific countries will obviously differ with their views while lacking scientific data to prove otherwise' (Letter by Dan Urai, Lautoka, Fiji Times, 26 August 2023)*

The remembrances of the Pacific region as testing ground for nuclear, atomic, and chemical weapons are quickly brought into the present by residues, leftovers, spills, leaks, and ongoing effects of chemical experiments. A region that has long been viewed by global powers as an externality; a 'sacrifice zone' that – supposedly - enables global peace, whilst 'wastelanding' these same places, now must suffer the double indignity of absorbing the 'wastewaters' that come from these experiments.[353] *Another letter in the Fiji Times in that same day writes, bitingly, that the author has heard the toxic water dump may lead to sea level rise. He wonders whether the water may be treated with laughing gas, too?*

The reaction to the wastewater plans provides a snapshot of the contemporary chemical consciousness which holds old and new memories of colonial-climate experimentation. The era-spanning material and symbolic aspects of nuclear contamination attaches itself to new concerns that centre the Pacific in a move towards recognition, with calls to address sea level rise, and the sign 'Pacific Lives Matter' connecting the black rights movement with the

[353] Tsing, 2019, p.25.

racialised logic of climate impacts. It is with this backdrop of chemical presences that farmers frame their own use of chemicals, those domesticated bottles perched on top of worktops and left in fields, bringing global waterways back down into local bays.

The anti-chemical discourse: Biblical, pre-colonial, and gendered dimensions

Chemical temptation

Fieldnotes, Holy Cross Church, 31st October 2023

The Holy Cross Catholic Church in Wairiki, which originally founded Tutu rural training school, has six-to-eight-thousand parishioners, and over one-thousand students of primary and secondary age attend its classes each day. The church is large, domineering, a cross high up on a hill overlooks the many settlements that make up the centre of the island. Father Isoa meets me on the veranda of his home, upstairs of the church offices and common room, and overlooking the large rugby field that is often busy with activity in the evenings and weekends. Father Isoa is retired ('but not resigned… I am relaxed when I am working') and was one of many people who in his early years in Taveuni helped to build Tutu, located about a mile down the coastal road. He reminds me that he is not from Taveuni but is from Namosi in the mainland, 'bush people, they call us'. He has been an educator for over four-decades but is increasingly dismayed by a focus on white-collar achievement as promoted by the government and the implanting of urban ambitions into rural peoples, which leads to feelings of failure amongst young people who return to villages: 'It is not a failure of a person, but of a system', he says, forlornly. The metrics of success and failure permeate through society; a young man from the north of the island, standing outside a kava barrel, tells me he could not wait to bring his certificate from tertiary education home to his family, so that he could get straight back to farming, what he had always planned to do anyway.

Father Isoa continues: 'How is it that young people know life is worth living, where they are?' he passes me a bowl of freshly cut papaya. To this end, he has started a programme for young adults in the surrounding settlements to meet and discuss their issues: he calls it 'Gap' which signifies the gap between young/old, rural/urban, past/present. 'We are stuck in between'. The youth 'lose sight' of possibility, fall into repetitive patterns of village life that absorb their time, so he repeats to them: 'The new parish is not waiting for us, we are carrying it with us […] We were sitting there [by a large tree] one day, and I pointed to the coconut tree, I said it can't change into a pawpaw. It grows, that's how it changes. Through change, it grows'.

He paraphrases Pope Francis, that it is 'not a world of change, but a changing world'.

When Laudato Si', the Pope's encyclical on 'our common home', was first translated into Fijian, it was handed out to parishioners.

> *'If you give Laudato Si' to the old people, translated into Fijian, they will say – yeah, we know that… We are a young people […]*
>
> *The reality began sinking in… we see the evidence; our land is not like before… They feel used'.*

In the past people spoke of future generations when referring to environmental concern, but now: 'they are talking of their own children'. He tells me the story of his grandfather. When Isoa was a child, his grandfather passed one tree and told the young boy: 'Silence!'. He remembers he was scared. Now he realises, his grandfather did not mean to scare him, only that he revered that tree.

> *'My grandfather… I only heard 'the spirit that lives', never the devil… Until we go back, we will spray, because we don't see God in the land'.*

Father Isoa alludes to a pre-Christian past before traditional ancestral worship was made '*vakatevoro*' (in the way of the devil) by missionisation. His focus on a 'changing world', however, challenges neat distinctions between the common dichotomy in Oceanian history between the light/dark times.[354] Instead, he speaks of gaps: 'We are stuck in *between'*, the old ('but we weren't there so it doesn't work') and the new ('it does not originate with us, it doesn't work'). Focusing on the process of change allows for 'going back' to go forward; *the way of the* land is made a corrective but is given prospective momentum. Change, as in hope's 'indeterminate character… serves as a method of radical temporal reorientation of knowledge'.[355] In this way, cultural critique - in the form of chemical critique - is aimed at inspiring positive social action, such as restoring respect for the *vanua* in all its aspects, moving towards a past that is viewed as in keeping with Fijian ideals. This reorientation of knowledge (from the devil in the land to the 'spirit that lives') challenges anthropology's retrospective orientation, as evidenced by ethnographies of Fijian social change that frame change as an *object* of analyses, rather than a *process* which evades capture by retrospective means of analyses.[356]

[354] Tomlinson, 2004, p.654.
[355] Miyazaki, 2004, p.69.
[356] See Nayacakalou (1978) on education and social change, and Ravuvu (1988) on money and social change.

In Ravuvu's (1988) study of social change in Fiji, he refers to people for whom modern forms of education has created a sense of alienation from village life as '*tamata vakararavi'* (dependent persons): 'They cannot return to their local way of living and have no influence over their future'.[357] This sense of dual alienation mirrors Father Isoa's concern of those people stuck *between*, are they to search out urban employment of which their education is based, but of which there are few opportunities, or are they return to villages after tertiary education or periods of employment; the widely-held perception being that of a failure, as wasting the communal resources of those who facilitated one's move (though it does appear to be differently seen when returning as a young family).[358] As Father Isoa reminds his cohort above, however, their 'failure' is not theirs alone, and through personal autonomy they can aim to pursue a different ethic of 'success'. Though, as many in Tutu were keen to point out, this is not without personal and interpersonal plight. Frequently it was said that young men who returned to the village after Tutu – whose very intention was *always* to return to the village – even still experienced a 'disillusionment' period, in which the *gap* between Tutu and the social pressures of village life seemed too great; they fall back into 'old ways' (such as, ironically, using chemicals).

As Father Isoa remarks, Laudato Si' is frequently said to align easily within a *vanua* theology. Rawson (2017, p.878) states that Laudato Si's particular relevance to Pacific peoples is its role as an: 'emancipatory discourse of ecospirituality that moulds ecology into a social and theological context and brings moral responsibility to the centre of the contemporary debate'. Father Isoa, and Tutu, modify this notion of emancipation to, rather, suggest an inculturation; the dialectical interaction between Christian faith and indigenous traditional belief systems, with each challenging, affirming, and transforming the other. It is in this *syncretic theology* that 'moral responsibility' is put at the heart of ecological decisions, reflecting a spiritual concern that historicises chemical use within the terms of missionary, colonial, and capitalist ideology. It also returns agency and responsibility to young farmers who have been viewed as dependent on others, often elders, for moral clarity.

The wild, unruly fecundity of the Garden Island meets chemical control; thereby 'cleaning' the land and bringing light (necessary for taro production) where before there was only darkness. But in this time of 'light', the effect on freshwater availability and soil fertility resulting from the twinned acts of deforestation and agrochemical use confronts farmers with new dark realities of declining crops, a Biblical *and* traditional symbol of sin. The spiritual-ecological alignment proffered by Laudato Si' has

[357] Ravuvu, 1988, p.87.

[358] Estimates suggest around 10,000 graduates returning to villages annually, compared with around 8,000 who find professional work or short-term employment in, for example, the tourism sector (Kivi, 2018, p.266).

become a clarion call for Catholics in the centre of the island; and a way to argue for a realignment of rural priorities away from the 'Faustian bargain' of agricultural modernisation toward a Marian ecological spirituality.[359] But this realignment is not just a turn away from commerce in a simple mapping on of *the way of money/the way of the land* dialectic, but rather - in Tutu's synthesis of *vanua*-centric and Biblical symbols of prosperity and decline - it becomes a question that analogises the way of money with Biblical temptation, and the way of the land with faith, further revealing the inherent equivalences between the *vanua* and Mary.

Fieldnotes, Tutu Rural Training Centre, 22nd September 2023

I meet Liti at the top of Tutu's grounds, Nazareti, perched high above the surroundings this is where the young farmers live; they have just departed for their 'oscillation period' where they stay five weeks in their villages. Nazareti is so named because it was the place 'where Mary listened and pondered in her heart… [it] is the call to be with God alone and from that experience we see, we know, what we have to do'.[360] The women are planning a big kava barrel this week, and Liti sits in the classroom working on course preparation for when the boys return.

Liti: 'There's one of our relatives, he's a big taro farmer, he uses chemicals. Most of the time during our grog sessions we always debate on this topic, us gang - myself and my husband - we always tell them this and that, the connection of all this, we shouldn't use chemicals because we're going to kill this stuff, and he'll say:

> *"Listen to this one, I've been farming this land for thirty-years and I'm earning all the same, and the quality of my products are the same, so where do you stand? It's been thirty or so years now I've been using the same land, same product, the quality of the product is the same, the income that I've earned is never going down – like you say - us eh - so where's your proof?"*

So, we always debate on that topic, and I told my husband, maybe one day he'll come to understand what we're trying to tell him… most people are still on the chemical side, maybe a little percentage are on our side now, but we're trying to come in slowly eh. People they've heard about it, but the temptation of gaining more income, that's where most of them serve at the moment.'

Liti symbolically draws on a dialectic between faith and temptation that her interaction with her uncle in the south of the island highlights; the use of chemicals being a frequent topic at kava sessions; neighbours challenging each other on variously ecological, economic, and moral bases. Moving to organic farming is, admittedly, a move away from 'the temptation of gaining more income', a fact that

[359] Grandia, 2022, p.130, Kivi, 2018, pp.231-241.
[360] Jones and McVerry, 2012, p.116.

she later tells me has meant her and her husband have stayed in Tutu as course coordinators longer than they had first imagined. After much consideration, they decided it was better to stay in Tutu than to submit to her relative's demands of using his land: 'better we just plant here and go with a low target, instead of trying to go outside of Tutu to earn more'. However, for young and unmarried farmers, it is acknowledged that this is not an option; going back to their villages and seeking autonomy within the village context is their priority post-Tutu. Previous participants refer to village life as 'like a magnetic force pulling all the energy and resources out of me', and 'Tutu is like the breeding ground for heaven, but village life is the reality of life on earth'. Thus, when course participants leave, they are reliant on their five-year plan, 'which I call my Bible'.[361] Whilst Biblical teachings can challenge 'temptation… where most of them serve at the moment', it cannot, however, shield young farmers from being at the nexus of competing risks and rewards, and the views of family and community members. There is a risk that in entwining the anti-chemical discourse with faith, then, one's *failure* to stay organic can similarly threaten one's sense of faith. Whilst in *Nazareti*, where 'Mary listened and pondered in her heart', it may be clear what one must do, the social pressures, market expectations, and cultural obligations of village life often pull young farmers 'back down' into reality.[362]

I want to briefly draw a comparison between Taveuni and Cicia island in the Lau group, Fiji's first 'organic island', to draw out some salient points related to faith, the chemical, and trajectories of decline. Interlocutors in Larsen's (2021) ethnography on Cicia pointed to two main precedents for banning chemicals: declining marine resources (signalling land-sea interconnectivity) and a Bible study that focused on the book of Daniel, which proposes the health - and spiritual - benefits of simple food.[363] The island's location in remote Fiji means that even before its organic status, chemicals were not widespread, as access to markets is limited and its main export, copra, is now a 'high-value' product. Beyond using organic methods of agriculture, however, an 'organic way of life' comprised many other aspects: housebuilding, fishing, and traditional seafaring. This return to the *way of the land* can sometimes be complicated by what one counts as 'land' - and therefore part of 'going back' - which may differ; some islanders in Cicia said they were not 'completely organic' because men still smoke.[364] Conversely, a bus stop I passed regularly in Vuna village that was emblazoned with spray paint said: '*God grow it, we smoke it'*, stretching – perhaps wishfully – what is 'of the land', what is 'organic' and thus what can be included in the *past* one is moving toward.[365] This move *towards* the

[361] Previous course participants quoted in Jones and McVerry, 2012, pp.107-109.
[362] Ibid., p.116.
[363] Fache and Pauwels, 2022, p.2381.
[364] Larsen, 2021, p.64.
[365] On a more recent visit (April 2025), one of the roofing iron panels had been knocked down, randomly or intentionally, leaving just *'we smoke it'*.

past, however, is 'mostly concerned with directing attention to the future by revitalising a diminished sense of autonomy'.[366] The diminished sense of autonomy that is sought through these projects suggests a desire to, following Marcus (2011), relocate islanders in time; going *organic* and going *back* becoming synonymous, both pointing to a time before the chemical and before a loss of indigenous autonomy as a result of spiritual impurity.

The 'organic' way of life as proposed by Tutu in eco-theological terms, then, becomes the Fijian way of life, imagined as both before the chemical, and – as Father Isoa stated at the start of this chapter – before the devil. This entwinement of Biblical and pre-colonial visions of indigenous futurity is understood implicitly as mutually reinforcing, as each speaks of the entanglement of lost *power* and lost *virtue* through the prism of the chemical. Cicia is, however, less entangled in commercial markets than Taveuni, where regular interisland ferries and the local airstrip provide frequent access to markets. Thus, where Cicia's 'traditionalist' discourse speaks of a return to a local, indigenous episteme from a detached agronomic episteme, the discourse on Taveuni relies more heavily on the value of *individual* autonomy rather than *group* conversion. Indeed, one interlocutor made it clear to me that collectively embracing traditional methods was only possible in Cicia *because* it was a small island. In contrast to this widescale conversion, in Liti's words, 'we're trying to come in slowly', which is exemplified by patient discourse around the kava barrel; 'it's three years now and I think they're still using [chemicals]… we had that same experience… it's gonna take a while. Because I told him: look at us, it took us how many years to understand'. Encouraging sustainable farming practices in Taveuni is constrained by the socio-economic expectations of many farmers, which disentangles notions of faith from the sphere of commerce. In turn, Tutu's equivalences between indigenous and Christian eco-spiritualities become of less relevance. I will now move to this emerging dialectic, which invites critique not through reference to temptation, but rather ambivalence as a condition of modernity.

Interlude / staying in the bush

> *We are sitting on the veranda at Joseph and his son Paul's house in Narusa as a young farmer walks up. He complains about the recent theft of some of his yaqona. Paul and his younger cousin Mika nod and tut. It is not uncommon, they say, but it still hurts, especially with yaqona as it means three-years' work was for nothing. Paul says that is why it is good to stay up on the farm. The young farmer leaves, sullenly. Last year, Paul says, he spent many months up in Nakaresi, a farm owned by his uncle who is living in New Zealand. There he said he would only*

[366] Larsen, 2021, p.74.

come down once a week to charge his phone, and after months people in the village forgot he was up there.

'People down here, they're scared of being up there. They think the Devil is up there, or something. But there's nothing to be scared of. The real problem is round here', he says, as his eyes roam around the settlement.

Chemical modernity

In the above, I have discussed the moral landscape of central and south Taveuni that draws on the Biblical frame of reference. Ecological retribution for moral failure – the failure to 'be aware of our Mother Earth who is crying', is symbolic of both 'not seeing God in the land' as Father Isoa put it to me, but also inversely of being seen and being judged: '*the land has ears, eyes, and a mouth'*, in a common variation on a theme. In the following section I will move on to discuss references to temporally more proximate framings of land-based reciprocity. The 'chemical question' in this frame is less starkly defined as temptation versus faith and is, rather, contiguous with other strands of thought that distinguish the benefits of technology and science from the perceived *excesses* of modernity. In this way, ecological failure (declining crop yields because of agrochemical intensification) is turned inwards to the self in relation to the temptations of modernity, and resulting human, moral, and ethical failure. Modernity in this sense is not only failing the land but similarly fails rural people. As Alexander (2023, p.24) puts it:

> *'This is failure as a mode of excess and refusal that transcends or merges scales and temporalities, spills over from work into kin care, threatens to turn charges of moral failure back at the accusers, reverberates across space and time, and is entangled with other consequential failures: accumulating, sedimenting – intensifying.'*

The 'failure' to commercialise traditional land, as stated by Tutu, is a structural failure that compounds with the f(l)ailing promise of chemicals.[367] Chemical failure, both the choice to adopt chemicals and their ever-dwindling returns, thus, appear in interlocutors in varied ways that go beyond mere shame/blame moralising towards more complicated feelings of ambivalence, resignation, despair, and nostalgia. Declining soil productivity is seen as both cause *and* result of chemical failure which is, indeed, the inevitable result of subscribing to modern lifeways. In this way, the chemical becomes another mediating tool between past and present that re-presents that past as morally superior.

[367] Jones and McVerry, 2012, p.7.

Katarina commented on the scarcity of water in the south of the island, a common sight in the dry season being water containers piled up on verandas and people bathing in the sea in *tuvus* (freshwater springs at the shoreline which empty out into small, rocked enclaves): 'elders before they didn't use any chemicals; so water was down there [in the south of the island], they were healthy, they reached ages we couldn't reach now'. This reading of the south's water scarcity reflects a 'chemosociality' that hybridises both watery and chemical elements to form, in my interlocutors' construction, a contemporary, moral indictment of *modern* farmers.[368] Interlocutors also speak of traditional methods where plentiful available land allowed the employment of rest periods, intercropping, and engaged labour (manpower) as opposed to technology (for example, brush-cutters and chemicals) to tackle the ever-present issue of 'weeds' (*co tawa yaga*, literally: 'useless grass') on a fertile island. Whilst the use of chemicals in rural life is not entirely novel; the extent of present application is posited as the primary issue. In traditional fishing, the *duva* plant (*derris elliptica/derris trifoliata*) was used to 'drug fish'; the roots pounded and mixed with water, which stunned fishes and made them easy to catch. Now, however, abuse of this technique, the addition of a glass bottle 'smashed' on the corals to release the powder, and in some cases the addition of chlorine or orthene (a broad-spectrum insecticide) into the mouth of rivers, has led to low levels of fish, or in the case of prawns: a red hue that signifies that they are unhealthy to eat. Mere, staying in Narusa, lamented she could no longer go down there to clean their clothes, told me: 'they poisoned the river'.

Another striking image of modernity's excesses is the seemingly haphazard disposal of chemical bottles on plantations. However, this image is more complex than it first appears, melding two ideologies of 'cleanliness', one modern (chemical use) and one traditional (keeping the farm 'clean' of rubbish). The placing of used bottles and containers under trees is, in fact, reflective of the traditional covering of taro tops and kava planting material (*kasa*) under grass and tree cover, adapted for the plethora of bottles piled in discrete corners of the farm: 'covering the bottles' (*ubi ni tavaya)*. Whilst 'safe' disposal of containers is difficult, as waste is often buried with other non-perishable packaging, and others may be burnt, releasing toxic fumes into the air, this type of waste management harks back to traditional Fijian beliefs that the showing or exposure of rubbish on farms is a sign that famine will follow: '[the rubbish] will steal the flesh of the root crops growing underground so the harvest will be poor'.[369] In turn, keeping the farm 'clean', a primary concern of interlocutors who used chemicals, is laden with a traditional sense of cleanliness that speaks of rubbish 'stealing the flesh' of root crops, a land reciprocating its maltreatment. This is modernity's excesses being subsumed into traditional ways of managing waste, although as Nainoca (2011) notes of farmers in Viti Levu, the slippage from

[368] Willemin and Backhaus, 2023, p.2.
[369] Nainoca, 2011, p.131.

‘*maroroi na benu’* (carefully put away the rubbish) to ‘*viritaka na benu’* (throw away the rubbish) is suggestive of the ways ‘throw away culture’ has shifted practices away from ‘care’ (which Figure 11 similarly suggests). Chemical waste, even covered, remains dangerous to the environment and to passersby; in seeking one form of cleanliness, rubbish persists as a visible sign of chemical modernity’s excessive consumption that resists subsummation.

Figure 11. Photograph of taro farm, with bottles of chemicals visible.

For those farmers for whom the ‘chemical question’ is less a moralistic consideration, either due to personal conviction or an assumption of productivist logics, a wider frame of modernity is applied to its use/non-use. In these terms, the choice to not use chemicals (or not use them so much) can come down to multiple factors, which I will summarise thematically:

1. They are too expensive due to the high cost of living on the island. Addressing this, they can be provided by taro buyers with whom farmers have a non-formal contract with, so that when the harvest comes up the cost of the chemicals is taken out of the farmers’ income. This arrangement requires a cooperative model of farming as larger quantities of taro are required to make it worthwhile. Those in settlements are less likely to engage in cooperative models than villagers who share *mataqali* (clan) land.

2. Suspicions that community health is in a downward trajectory because of the diets that most people eat. As well as pointing towards the plethora of processed foods, such as noodles, that often take the place of ‘true foods’ *(kakana dina)* in meals, eating sprayed taro from the farm is similarly associated with sickness, diminished body size, and unexpected deaths. All of these provide evidence of the negative effects of chemical ingestion.

3. Renewed unease amongst villagers following the pandemic about chemicals as well as their foreign nature being viewed as alien to ancestral Fijian ideals of ecological harmony. Some viewed the pandemic and the vaccine as symptomatic of modernity's excesses, with both being a cause of sickness, and had even resorted to having the vaccine 'taken out'. Indigenous conceptions of the *vanua* which place utmost importance on inter-relationality provide a source to draw on to counteract these 'unnatural' deviations.

4. The push by the Ministry of Agriculture, local NGO TeiTei Taveuni, and Tutu, to promote organic, natural, liquid fertilisers, and the use of nitrogen-fixing cover crops such as mucuna bean, the positive impact of which was seen as a weed suppressant and on taro yield, as compared to grass fallow.[370] The success of organic agricultural implements could be seen on TeiTei Taveuni's 'demonstration farms', as well as in farms across the island which encourage farmers to experiment with new methods of pest control and fertilisation.

5. Engaging kin and neighbours in reciprocal labour could reduce the need for chemical inputs. Traditionally *solesolevaki* (communal labour) was organised by the *turaga-ni-koro* (village headman) to allow for village tasks to be completed, and this is still the case in many villages where one day per week will be set aside for village maintenance, however the planting and care of family's crops is not usually done this way. Where farming is done cooperatively in extended families they can plant, weed, and harvest crops together, thereby reducing the quantity of pesticides required by hand-weeding plots communally, and reducing monetary costs. One family, who had five young boys (four of which were out of school) referred to this way of work as '*na uto dua'* (one beating heart).

Modernity's excesses can be seen in the internalised logic of individualism that made choosing chemicals seem like the default option (in a context of neoliberalised small-scale semi-commercial agriculture), only strayed from where circumstances strongly discouraged their use. Indeed, one farmer visiting the Ministry of Agriculture was told she could receive organic manure in the form of a lactic acid bacterium (LAB) which solubilises ammonium and phosphate to make them available for plant uptake, a brochure she flicks through reads:

[370] Lal et al., 2016.

> *'LAB reinforces the ability of anabolism of microbes living on the plant stem and leaf, a condition that arose from the abuse of insecticides and fungicides… Fields will recover fertility and the soil will become soft and fluffy when LAB is sprayed on the field'.*[371]

The farmer says that she was not sure at first if she should have visited the extension office, in the central administrative centre of Waiyevo, Adi Kelera working behind the desk softly interjecting; 'This is your door, this is your house', to put any fears over 'wanting to *kerekere* like that' out of her mind. As explored in Chapter 2, instead of *kerekereing* being a way to 'get things done', self-consciousness may indeed inhibit people from asking for help. In this sense, the caution over being seen as *anti*-modern can stifle outreach that seeks to bolster organic alternatives such as LAB, further pushing people towards store-bought chemicals which support an image of the modern, individualistic farmer.

Despite these strong pressures to use chemicals, the widespread concerns over community health, soil infertility, and lingering feelings after the pandemic, have added fuel to an indigenising strand of thought that seeks to move away from the 'unnatural', as the risks of modernity's *excesses* appear ever starker. Within this context, Tutu's moralised anti-chemical sentiment attempts to sidestep claims of *anti-modernism*, framing the *vanua* in the wider plane of socio-ecological entanglement.[372] In this way, some attempt to draw equivalences between cultural respect and ecological respect to invoke values of *reciprocity* over those of *hierarchy*. Katarina, who was from Vuna but stayed in Tutu, told me about a sermon she had recently seen by a Methodist preacher on '*veivakaturagataki'* (in the manner of a chief) which had impressed her. In her analysis, it seems to me, she reflects on the challenge Tutu itself faces; of challenging modernity with reference to tradition, *without* evoking a cultural conservatism that constrains its syncretic eco-spirituality in a retrospective orientation.

> *Katarina: 'If I treat you like a chief, you'll give me back how I treat you… If I respect the soil, the soil will give back what I have given them. It begins from home, how you relate to your siblings, to your parents, to your uncles and aunties, then you will respect others who come in your way, and you will respect the living creatures. So, it was really challenging, and I told Jone: Oh I like the session that the pastor gave the youths, because it's really challenging not only to the youths, it is to everyone. So, if we can respect Tui Vuna – Tui Vuna is a living creature – why don't we respect the mother earth that we are planting? Because they have reasons to live too. Because our mentality is really driving us crazy, financially driven – people are financially driven - and they cannot understand this interconnectedness, cannot do it.*

[371] Ministry of Agriculture, n.d.
[372] Ravuvu, 1988, p.7.

[…]

If it happens that Tui Vuna one day comes along in a village community meeting: Okay, I've banned all the chemicals here in Vuna. You can imagine some of the farmers will run away from that southern end…because it's like it's in their blood, those chemicals, they cannot live without those chemicals – but – they can, if they choose to make a decision to love this nature, love this soil, love this mother earth. Like, uprooting yaqona on our farms, it's like a pregnant woman giving birth to a new baby, so everything is coming out. And it takes months for mothers to put themselves back and to be healthy again and be ready again for another childbearing, so as the mother earth. If you uproot something from it, you have to plant some nutrition to help it to get back its fertility, so if we keep on spraying it, mother earth is dying away – we are killing it.'

Again, I argue, the classic dualism of *the way of money/the way of the land* is expanded on by synthesis, in this instance with an explicit maternal connection in which Katarina mirrors chiefly respect and respect for mother earth under one banner: '*veivakaturagataki'* (in the manner of a chief). In this way, she forms a dialectical plane in which a masculine *culture* and feminine *ecology* co-exist whilst their fundamental – though variously hidden - values, as Tuwere (2002, p.110) states, bring them into alignment: love, humility, kindness, forgiveness, honesty, and care. The centrality of the notion of chief and *vanua* as 'nurturer' is a feature that Fijian activist Siwatibau (2008, pp.1-5) has remarked has been subsumed by masculinist interpretations of Christianity, wherein notions of dominance prevail over those of stewardship, care, and reverence. Reflecting on Liti's answer when I asked if the Tui Vuna could ban the use of chemicals, her response – that rules were less important than the relations that constituted these rules – points to the idea that power is both necessarily hierarchical *and* reciprocal. Indeed, I had seen in other cases that a chief's rules could be broken – if traditional protocols were not applied properly or conservation efforts that were predicated on enclosure disregarded underlying indigenous ontology, for example – and there was not much that could be done about this.[373] In this way, seeing fisherman at night in a marine protected area (MPA) of the village was not merely 'breaking the rules', but given that this group (the *gonedau*: fishermen) had been wrongfully omitted in earlier discussions, it was acknowledged that in a wider framing of moral ecology their act was a justified continuation of traditional practices.[374]

[373] Griffin et al., 2019, pp.21-22.

[374] See Veitiyaki and Holland (2018) on balancing community, national, and international scales of environment responsibility on Gau island, leading to establishment of 16 no-take zones within *qoliqoli* (customary fishing areas).

In the next section I return to the beginnings of this chapter, and that which has fed into all aspects of the preceding two dialectics, the gendered dimension of the anti-chemical discourse. Katarina's likening of uprooting yaqona to a mother giving birth reflects the feminine terms that the *vanua* is given by Fr. Borosio at the start of this chapter: 'It's a Mum, it's like a mother who is to have concern for its people'. As Katarina puts it: the choice for farmers is between the chemicals 'in their blood' and loving the mother, one speaks of consubstantial contamination and a perversion of socio-ecological interconnection; and the other, of giving back; of being a good *son* of the land. It is to these divergent pulls – between *individualism* and *belonging*, the *chemical* and the *mother* – that I will now turn.

Chemical men

> *Fieldnotes, 19th May 2024*
>
> *'Tagane se lewa?! Tagane se lewa?!' (Boy or girl?! Boy or girl?!), his uncle yells at him, as the boy of no more than twelve lifts another freshly dug up root of kava, making a stack that seems destined to fall. We are in a shaded part of Salialevu, adjacent to the family's large, exposed taro plantation. Today, the seven of us, myself, uncle Peli, and the five Raibevu boys between seven and sixteen, are harvesting around sixty-to-seventy plants of yaqona. Enough, I am told, to pay for the family's upcoming trip to Suva to see the Fijian Drua rugby team play. All but one of the boys have left school already, but their sister remains in school and is visiting from Suva where she stays with family. She is back at home helping with the new baby. The boys jostle and argue whilst forking up the soil around each plant, careful not to damage the kava's roots. The youngest boy proudly carries his share of kava to the truck waiting on the road, to be driven down to the river for cleaning, he stays quiet and focused.*

Boys are often said to have been 'put' on the farm in Taveuni. On the farm a boy sixteen years-old can make enough money to buy a pick-up truck, one parent tells me incredulously. On the other hand, it is here that a boy is put when it's deemed that he is not academic, Tevita the father of six pointed at his boys: 'if they can't make it to form three; try to teach them how to farm; we are men, boys eh'. Each afternoon from the back of the lean-to I stay in I see an elder returning on his fibreglass boat having been out fishing, his grandson in the boat. My neighbour, an older lady, remarks to me: 'It's not good is it, he should be in school'. On the farm young men find a place to define themselves outside of a mismatched education system, designed as it is for urban employment. Traditionally, boys are connected to the land in a corporeal way; the umbilical cord of boys is to be buried in the land, and those of girls to be thrown into the sea. One interlocutor buried the umbilical cords of his four

grandkids, who were born in New Zealand but are of Fijian descent, under four native trees on his land: 'otherwise they will always be searching'.[375]

The social belonging to, and through, land, that defines Fijian village environments is, however, viewed by Tutu as an impediment to the development of the young farmers' voices in traditional settings.

> 'Materials produced in western countries tend to emphasise the need for *belonging* whereas in our world it is the need for *autonomy* which needs to be stressed. Most of the…resource materials need to be turned upside down for us.'[376]

This is belonging not as feeling but as socio-cultural constraint. In this sense, the 'failure to commercialise traditional land' is entwined with a failure to develop the individual. The lack of tenure security that is emblematic of many *vakavanua* (of the land) agreements is a key causative factor for young farmers' concerns that their investments in their farms will not yield desired returns, impacting not only the time they are willing to spend developing land but also the employment of sustainable soil practices.[377] In this way, the constrictive aspect of *belonging* inhibits the development of young farmers, who in traditional hierarchy remain beneath elders who do not necessarily share the same socio-economic priorities. Young farmers' hierarchically low position, as not yet men with a voice in meetings and in deciding their futures leaves them feeling, as Liti told me: 'low of themselves, they think they are nothing, life will be just like that, they are not worthy of anything around their village'. There is respite from this 'overbelonging' on the farm, as many of the young men who farm in the hilly interior found. Sam emphasises the sense of freedom: 'you are your own boss' on the farm and 'there's no pressure to drink yaqona every night'. Indeed, a recent review of ex-participants found that around half said *yaqona* consumption continued to impact their work 'Most of the time', a fact indicating the ongoing struggle to balance 'community mindedness and active social lives with ensuring they are able to follow their […] ambitious plans'.[378] On the farm, some would complain of loneliness ('nobody drinks yaqona alone'), but more commonly what was expressed was a profound sense of freedom; of the individual and their ability to express themselves by their sweat.[379] In seeking autonomy, the farm

[375] The *sau,* a cord attached to the tanoa for kava drinking, which faces the direction of the chief, symbolises an umbilical cord that stretches out to the chief. As one interlocutor explained, only people from Taveuni could speak the truth about Taveuni. He rhetorically asked: '*where is your umbilical cord buried?*' He then added that the man whose house we were drinking grog was an honorary 'Kai Taveuni', even if he is from Levuka.
[376] Jones and McVerry, 2012, p.76.
[377] Lal et al., 2001.
[378] Boyle and Johnson, 2024, p.30, p.52.
[379] Toren (1988, p.704) remarks that this idiom – 'drinking yaqona alone' - is also commonly used to denote witchcraft. Sam's comment that 'nobody drinks yaqona alone' suggests the suspicions that attach to those who spend time alone in the farm need to be managed against a communal pressure to drink 'every night'.

provides a physical space apart from the constraints of the village, a place to develop oneself – indeed, prove oneself – to yourself and others.

Fieldnotes, Naiyalayala, 7th November 2023

Paul walks around his block of land, high up in the cooperative land of Naiyalayala. We stand in one corner, at the top looking down; this is where he plans to build his house one day. In the hardwoods around his plantation, he says he has seen the orange dove, endemic to Fiji. He perches one leg on top of a felled tree, one of a few he has said he needed to cut for his taro to get sufficient sunlight, surveying his plantation of interspersed strands of yaqona and rows of taro. No one believed him, he said, when he said he would start his farm up here. 'It's my own sweat', he says, looking out at the distance.

He points to his uncle George's farm behind a line of trees and a dirt road which meanders its way up the cooperative land. Sobusobu ('down down') *a well-known weather phenomenon on the island, eight nights of intense wind ('bogi walu') coming from the top of the mountain down through the farms. It was this that caused his uncle's yaqona to die, and this the reason he keeps a line of windbreaking trees at the top of his plantation. The trees on the bottom act as protection against the cyclones which come up from the seaward direction. When a cyclone is predicted, he cuts the leaves off the yaqona plants to make them less vulnerable to damage. 'I am learning every day', he says.*

He is applying for his passport and visa to move to New Zealand, his uncle who is over there helping him with paperwork. He is planting yaqona now so that when he comes back, he says, he won't have to 'beg' for kasa (planting stems). People act differently to you when you come back from abroad, he says, they think you are rich.

We sit down on FMF sugar bags, the ground still wet. He laughs about a man we saw walking up the road to his farm, having turned down our offer of a lift. 'It's good to see him walking', Paul says, he only ever sees him 'relaxing' in the village, he has gotten big.

'They are calling for me, come and clean us… too much staying in the village, the grog is crying' he says as we ascend through increasingly weedy areas, where grog plants are shaded over by others. Different varieties of yaqona appear as we weed tall grasses: matakoro, qila, loa, badrau (his favourite). He says he should come more often, if he was on his own it would take him a week to weed the whole farm: 'then can get a job, but not long, a day, one week'. His priority is the farm. He exposes another small grog plant; 'just like the women they clean their flowers', he says, smiling.

The immense pride Paul showed in his farm reflected the fatalistic doubt that was inculcated into him; reflective of Liti's words that young farmers do not believe they can expect much from village life. When youth's self-expression is constrained within the village context, the farm offers a place to show oneself; your work ethic; your plans; how you intend to make them real. However, the insecurity of land tenure remained a present concern for Paul, who farmed on a family member's land who was based in Suva, under a *vakavanua* (of the land) agreement, and was nervous upon hearing that she may one day sell the land. 'She will compensate him,' his uncle offered as reassurance, though the fear remained that his plan, rooted as it is to this piece of land, may not come to fruition.

When weeding the plantation, Paul – on his family member's insistence – does not use herbicides but 'cleans' by hand, likening it to 'the women [when] they clean their flowers'. Indeed, gendered notions of labour are common across agricultural practice on the island. Coffee, which used to be planted in Nayalayala when it was owned by Australian conglomerate Carpenters, continued to grow wild in places in and around the cooperative and further south in Soqulu, in a place aptly called Nakofi. In recent years, a Fijian businessman based in Suva has started buying these straggling bushes of wild-growing coffee for the artisanal market. One of his buyers on the island says it is mostly women and children who come to her during harvest time:

> Priya: '*The men think it is a bit funny, picking cherries'*.[380]

Where cherries and flowers are firmly women's domain, root crops (*kakana dina,* lit. true foods) are men's:

> Mosese: '*If you have no yam plantation, you are not a man… because when the chief calls you must see the yams… If you don't plant it, they call you a woman!'*

The feminisation of land practices then - weeding '*just like the women'*, as Paul said - challenges masculinist notions of control that are aligned with traditional expectations; that the yam, taro, cassava be there; and in great quantity. As decreasing soil fertility leads to lower crop yields, the pressure to use more chemicals becomes greater as their positive effect diminishes. Chemicals, in this way, are both symbols and sustainers of manhood, their use part of a regeneration of land, and a ritualistic transformation of boys to men. Tutu, taking inspiration from the 'mystery of Mary', then, stays 'hidden' in their work; tellingly there is no overt sign pointing you towards its grounds from the main road, for

[380] Villagers who had worked on Carpenters coffee plantation decades before remembered that the men occupied roles in the processing plant, whereas women were on the plantation. One woman remembered that as a child she and her friends would play between the rows of bushes whilst their mothers worked.

example.[381] In a more profound sense, the training offered to young male farmers speaks to them in ways that mirror Mary's Biblical role:

> *'She was hidden at Nazareth, so too she is hidden in the Upper Room at Pentecost. She occupies no position like Peter and the apostles but rather is behind them supporting them like a mother hidden behind the curtain prompting her child on stage to move forward comfortably.'*[382]

It is not only the motherly, nurturing side of the feminine that is enacted in the subtle workings of Tutu (in balancing what Fr. Borosio stated at the start of this chapter is the impulse to act out one's masculine side), it is also enacted *within* relationships, as Katarina, who undertook a Marriage Encounter course in 2004, says.

> Katarina: *'Back in the village, normally where I come from, only my brothers would go to the farm. I was kept off the farm. Coming here, everything - we were together on the farm.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *We cannot be going around preaching about these good marriages if we are not practicing the other side… When we started here, Jone couldn't let go of the chemical. Like he still wanted to use the chemical, and after we tried how many months – he didn't tell me that he had used the chemical again in the farm, here in Tutu. That was before we started our farm in Vuna. And it took me one day not to talk to him – I decided not to talk to him – cos I didn't accept it.*
>
> *I told him you cannot be preaching the good news if you are doing the opposite of it; practice what you preach. Then he realised that it had affected our relationship, because I wanted him to understand this interconnectedness we have with the living creatures, and later on he did.'*

When using the chemical impacted their relationship, Katarina wanted her husband to understand – in a profoundly intimate way – why it had done so. Embodying interconnectivity meant, for her, not speaking to him for a day; a feminist *tabu* (taboo, ban) in grieving solidarity with living creatures. Her response is flooded with a sense of betrayal; their 'good marriages' not what they appear if, on the other hand, they use chemicals on their land. A feminist *vanua* theology, thus, does not only offer ecological principles for young farmers to align themselves with, but also argues for their theological validity. This is an ecological conversion that is responsive to a particular group's concerns – autonomy – but challenges masculinist notions of how that autonomy can be achieved; in quietly challenging socio-cultural constraints (within a male hierarchy) the couples who teach these young farmers exhibit

[381] Jones and McVerry, 2012.
[382] Ibid., p.68.

'couple power', a merging of the *masculine* and *feminine* – of *farms* and *gardens* – to offer a vision of the good life that is not founded on chemical control, but rather on principles of land-centric theology. Young male farmers are offered another option apart from manhood gained through chemicalised agriculture, and reckon with fundamental perversions of power, land, and polity.

Interlude / the earth shall spoil

I sit on the floor of Meresiana's house in Jittu, an informal settlement in Suva, she is a lady in her 50s, she and her sister – bedridden and sleeping as we speak – are both from Taveuni, friends of my housemates. Her son comes in and eats before going out to train, he has a boxing match tomorrow. He is single, she says, after he leaves. I ask if he will get remarried. She says his ex-wife has gotten remarried.

She pauses.

'The earth shall spoil', she says, 'what do you think that means?'

I answer, sheepishly, that it seems to do with God's word. A reference to the Bible.

'Yes,' she says, quietly, 'what you plant won't work'.[383]

Conclusion

In locating the anti-chemicals discourse in Taveuni, I have shown that this argument derives strands from pre-colonial, Biblical, and gendered perspectives. In doing so I have posited that young farmers are at the nexus of divergent pulls towards alternate visions of the good life: one founded on chemical control, the other on organic interconnection. The work of the rural training school Tutu has been central within the island, as apostles (young farmers who have completed their courses) fan out into villages 'proclaiming the good news' and spreading 'the gospel of not using chemicals'. In turn, they have been met with challenges from within the village and often experience extreme disillusionment as they extricate themselves from socio-cultural constraints and village temporality, moving further into the bush and spending longer on their farms.

Within the trajectory of decline on the island, the notion of fertility – both within the land and in traditional structures of power – offers a useful metric from which to concurrently investigate social

[383] The Biblical quotation ends: '*For the mouth of the Lord has spoken these things*' (Isaiah 24:3).

and ecological health. Following the chemical through various vantage points on the island, then, is to highlight the complex relationship between neoliberal identities within markets and feminist theological insights, as offered by Tutu. The chemical question – encompassing moral and economic concern – is a central field in which the interplay of modernity and 'going back' is enacted; but this is a 'back' in which the *vanua* is made Mother Mary, and the chemical: temptation. Indeed, it is a Garden Island turned Eden; where 'original innocence' is a time when the taro was the size of your arm, there are no chemicals, and fertility is both found in the land (soil) and in the polity (chief). I have argued that this syncretic theology reinscribes fertility to bring forth its feminine character, the anti-chemical discourse tilling virgin soil and offering a vision of the good life that radically challenges patriarchal and hierarchical norms of village society; with the aim that the earth *shall not spoil*. Young men, who remain low in the village hierarchy and thus struggle to find their voice, continue to be at the nexus of these competing visions; their farms a testament to their character and the future they aspire to.

Chapter 5

'No other time': pragmatic fatalism at the end of the world

> *'Farmers they complain about stealing, but this is a world for stealing, stealing gonna happen. Climate and the thief is like the same thing, you can't do anything about it. Climate change, it steals from us!' (laughing and motioning to the sky as if a big hand was coming down to steal his crops)*
>
> *– Silio, 27.3.2024*

During the Conference of Parties (COP) 23 in 2017, organised by Fiji, its then-prime minister Frank Bainimarama, told the audience: '*I would like to convey to this gathering the human face and dimension of climate change; and who can do this better than a child?*' A young boy from Tailevu province, Timoci Naulusala, took to the stage, his speedy upbeat delivery only slowed, and deepened, once, as he spoke of the impact on his village of Cyclone Winston, the year prior. The Fijian village became, for this brief discursive moment, the site of climate change impact, the raw evidence of its destructivity. The '*thief in the night'*, as Naulusala called climate change, steals from both the present and the future: eating away at land, and at childhoods.[384] The 'human face' of disasters often being that of a child suggests the way in which globalised visual cultures of risk draw their affective weight – and mediate feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and indeterminacy - from the juxtaposition of youthful innocence and the horrors of modernity.[385] In this way, climate change acts as prophecy, of which images, stories, and the plethora of academic attention, are signals of the nearing end; a feeling that was reflected in my interlocutors' sense of the *inevitable*. Indeed, one day when undertaking an environmental survey with an old man in the southern settlements, he remarked: '*Ah, the prophet*!' when I told him my name, not only bringing one type of prophecy (climate change) which speaks of climate catastrophe, but also another (the Book of Joel), which speaks of apocalyptic judgement by God's hand.

A common response when I enquired about climate change in urban Suva was that I had to go to the village to 'see' climate change, furthering the idea that the village is the site of climate *imminence*. This inverts a common temporal relationship of city (future) to village (past), rather suggesting that the village is on the *frontlines* of climate temporality. Its asynchronous relationship with urban centres (and indeed with the wider world), highlights how the Fijian village has, in this sense, always been *time* masquerading as *space*. It is also, tellingly, the place where urbanites would tell me the 'real Fijian

[384] Dreher and Voyer, 2014; Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012; Farbotko, 2010; Lazrus, 2012.
[385] Butler, 2013.

culture' is, as a marker of a modernist chronology that has historically posited its temporality as *of the past*. In this chapter, I will explicitly focus on the temporal frames which have underpinned much of the preceding chapters' ethnographic tension and interlocutors' self-reflexivity. I will take a longitudinal view of the 'novel' time of climate change to ask how continuities with modernist temporalities (defined as linear, finite, and oriented towards the future),[386] maintain an image of rural fixity which repeatedly depicts villages in limiting ways.

I will explore eco-theological responses to climate change which mix socio-environmental commentary and prophecy to suggest ways that these responses reflect attempts to regain agentic capacity in the face of discursive and temporal disempowerment. Commentators and ethnographers of the Pacific islands have reflected on these two types of *prophetic knowing*, Biblical and worldly, to argue that faith must not be seen as a 'barrier' to environmentalism in a highly religious region.[387] Indeed, as this chapter will highlight, eco-theology brings the past *and* future into the present moment, as colonial histories of land intersect with issues of livelihood resilience. Where previous chapters have focused on the past as a socio-political resource, in this chapter the central notion of *blame* extends this interrogation further to both how blame shapes future orientations to issues of ethics and agency, and is shaped *by* future imaginaries, variously apocalyptic and pragmatic. Blame, importantly is not just 'finger-pointing', but also 'sense-making' of the present moment, a mechanism by which people navigate conditions of change and enunciate a moral order.[388] In this way it is similarly an orientation towards future-making; being variously condemnatory and purifying in an entangled teleology of two apocalyptic visions; climate catastrophe and Biblical ends.[389] To understand the ways in which blame operates at a local scale, first I will introduce the underpinning temporal dimension of climate change, and how it intersects with existing temporalities in Taveuni.

Temporal sense-making

During the period of my primary fieldwork in Taveuni (September 2023 – May 2024), unseasonal weather – this being an El Niño year – created a strong sense of unpredictability that impacted upon temporality and sociality in diverse ways. In the first months of the wet season in late 2023, Taveuni experienced a drought (*dravu-i-siga*, lit. turned to ashes by the sun), the weather station at Matei airfield registering the record lowest total monthly rainfall for October since observations began in

[386] Hammer, 2011, pp.37-57.
[387] Fache and Fair, 2020, Mortreux and Barnett, 2009.
[388] Rudiak-Gould, 2015, p.52.
[389] See Bryant and Knight, 2019, pp.16-19.

1956 (7% of normal rainfall).[390] The month before George had complained to me that his plans to harvest *yaqona* for his return trip to New Zealand had been scuppered by heavy rains. He had chosen September to travel back as it was, according to the weather records, the driest month and, thus, perfect for drying yaqona: 'More like the wettest month now!', he retorted. Unpredictable weather made for strange temporalities that upended plans even when based on meteorological records, as above.

When interlocutors remarked upon this unpredictability, divine agency was often foregrounded:

> *Mosese: 'Only one person knows about the season: it's God'.*
>
> *Asenaca: 'The time will change, sometimes it will be hurricane and sometimes it will be drought; that is God's power'.*

During the latter parts of my fieldwork (March-April 2024) when undertaking socio-environmental perception surveys, many respondents noted that 2024 had been a good one for farmers so far, rain and heat arriving in balance. However, out of twenty-five people surveyed, nineteen responded that this year was 'different' than in previous years, with reference made to unpredictability: 'dry season is wet, wet season is dry' and 'you can't predict the weather tomorrow' a common refrain on a theme. In dealing with this sense of *unpredictability*, it is important to note the centrality of seasonality to temporal sense-making amongst farmers, a key aspect of being able to make plans. The increasing interest in time in anthropology, especially 'claims to the future', reflects an ethical engagement with the topic of agency in moments of crisis.[391]

The aim of this chapter is to interrogate the near future specifically, by way of environmental surveys (see Appendix 1). In focusing on environmental action taken now, and perceptions of viable near futures, I aim to balance the oft-invoked far-sighted fatalisms of Pacific islanders in the face of climate change with more immediate concerns which may differ in emphasis, response, and scale. Pacific islands are refused coeval status with the rest of the world in the climate discourse's search for the near future, coming to stand in for the 'distant horizon', a foreshortening of time employing visual imagery such as the foreshore itself. Interestingly, even the oft-referred to framing of Pacific islanders as 'canaries in the coal mine' of climate change invokes a spatial metaphor (*going* first) to envisage temporal linearity (*being* first), which makes islands a synecdoche for the world's imagined future.

[390] Fiji Meteorological Service, 2023.
[391] Morosanu and Ringel, 2016.

Guyer (2007, pp.413-5) has proffered that modern time has evacuated the concept of the near future (replaced by 'ultimate origins' and 'distant horizons'), echoing an evangelic conceptualisation of prophetic time. The near future becomes:

> *'a kind of hiatus, whose intelligibility is explicitly in abeyance… the midrange of personhood, history, and reasoning is profoundly attenuated and seen as morally dangerous… [t]he idea of a gap, a space, a rupture in time that cannot and should not be mediated by "scoffing" but endured by waiting, by identifying, by witnessing, is the basic approach to time in the near future.'*

Whilst 'climate time' is made to appear novel; of *urgent presentism* and *imagined catastrophic futurity,* it intersects readily with other pre-existing times within the context of the Fijian village: for example, linear and cyclical time. Pre-missionisation Oceanian belief systems were largely devoid of notions of teleological time, cosmic eschatologies, and recovered paradisical orders.[392] Ritual and environmental recurrences mark Oceanian calendrics, for example the Fijian calendar (*Vola ni Vula Vakaviti*) still published by *Nai Lalakai* newspaper today, which defines months by traditional planting and harvesting cycles, and the appearance of different fish species.[393] Cyclical perspectives on time are also evident in the power ascribed to inter-generational naming practices (*yaca*: namesake), building upon familial foundations (*yavu*: foundation), and the power of ancestors' words to return and be acted upon in the present (*mana*). In these varied phenomena, a sense of continuity is afforded the passing of time. Inversely, the prophetic Biblical time of dispensations (eras) is explicitly a discontinuous, linear, irreversible time map. Dispensationalism is a way of reading the Bible that emphasises the connections and progress between periods of the Divine's dealings with mankind.[394] Throughout this chapter I will foreground how Fijians in Taveuni, then, conceptualise and show commitment to both continuous and discontinuous time in the everyday and in their narratives of the future.

Where previous chapters have explored connections to the past through temporal shrinkage, this chapter focuses on inverting etic *foreshortenings* of time (as *evidence* of climate change) to highlight the ways in which interlocutors in Taveuni elongate time to various ends, keeping apocalyptic futures at bay whilst perpetually scanning for signs of the end. In this way, the island is centralised in Biblical history, both in time and space: 'If Fiji is Eden, Taveuni is the heart of Eden' (Lusi). I suggest that this practice is enacted not purely out of religious faith, but also part of a *pragmatic fatalism* which engages

[392] Trompf, 2011, p.437.
[393] See also Van Aken (2022) on traditional weather calendars as being a way to root culture by 'dwelling in the atmosphere'.
[394] Sweetnam (2010, p.198) offers a five-point definition of dispensationalism which outlines its 'redemptive program', emphasis on the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture, and millennial expectation.

with a near future that speaks of moral responsibility in changing times. To this end, farmers in Taveuni regain a sense of temporal agency not *in spite of* fatalism, but rather through its totalising logic.

I specifically discuss *time* to draw on emic notions of climate change resilience that, akin to the previous chapter, produce syncretic temporalities that mutually uphold the logic of decline, return, and salvation. The 'catastrophic futurity' of climate time parallels Biblical temporal alignments, where responsibilities are always related to the future, highlighting the intimate connection between modern, secularised forms of futurity and Christian salvation narratives.[395] Where eschatological and climate times overlap, farmers enmesh these with their own local ontologies of cyclical village time and linear post-Winston time. The way these times interact with each other exposes different understandings of temporal agency and can be employed at different moments and for different purposes. Moroşanu and Ringel (2016, p.17) call the dynamic ways in which people navigate time; 'time-tricking', which:

> *'refers to the many different ways in which people individually and collectively attempt to modify, manage, bend, distort, speed up, slow down or structure the times they are living in.'*

Time-tricking clearly has a role in assuming agency in colonial and post-colonial states; as when indigenous socio-spiritual resistance movements arose in colonial-era Fiji in response to contemporary grievances (land dispossession and middleman exploitation, for example) and employed *prophecy* as one ideational component of an inversion of power, centralising and inverting temporalities within their criticism and ritual-infused attempts to resolve grievances.[396] Indeed, these movements draw on the unrealised aspirations of individuals, generalising belief which can be validated through experience, so that in the end 'everything that happens in social life fulfils the prophecy'.[397] In contemporary times, Fijians have employed time-tricking through archival document research and

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[395] Siegemund, 2021, p.131.

[396] Note: For example, the *Tuka* (immortality) movement in the late-19th century of Mosese Dukumoi, known as Navosavakadua (see Kaplan, 1995), and Apolosi Nawai's *Na Lotu ni Gauna* (Church of Time, or: Religion of the New Age), formed in 1929, which was the spiritual arm of the Viti Kabani, aimed at exporting produce and cutting out the foreign middleman (see Chapter 3, MacNaught, 1982, pp.75-92, van Fossen, 1986, p.162-3). Both employed *prophecy* to predict inverted power relations, imagining returns of Fijian gods, a return of sold lands, and to varying levels the expulsion of Europeans and Indo-Fijians from Fiji: 'Whites were to serve natives and chiefs were to be inferior to commoners' (Worlsey, 1971, p.20, on Navosavakadua's message). Both these responses are suggestive of the ways crises, millenarian ideology, and ethnonationalism can be sequentially entwined in situations where populations are homogeneous, compact, and perceived to be vulnerable (see Barkun, 1974, p.127). Indeed, colonial officials were very aware of Nawai's use of prophetic rhetoric, and framed him as 'one to watch', he was referred to in former Fijian governors' personal correspondences as: 'The John Baptist of a possible future' (Richards, 1938) and 'Rasputin of the Pacific' (Luke, 1945, p.140). Elsewhere a native minister proclaimed: 'Know this also that Apolosi is like John the Baptist, I like Jesus, God has spoken to me and told me to free Fiji' (quoted in Thomas, 1997, p.56).

[397] Worsley, 1971, xiv.

within oral history, open questioning, and indeterminate understandings of land, as explored in previous chapters.[398]

This form of indigenous time-tricking is confronted with another 'trick', which applies to the production of novelty that underpins much of the argument, in Western ontological thinking, that climate change denotes *rupture*. As Connell (2018) explores in the Carteret Islands, the doomsday imagery often used to depict this small atoll employs an 'eschewing [of] residual normality', attaching particular significance to high tides, flooding, and felled coconut trees strewn on shorelines. That these images also show 'disappearing islands appear[ing] idyllic',[399] suggests the cosmopolitan imaginary at play which balances anxiety over the future with a sense of 'nostalgia alongside regret, romance, idealism and loss'.[400] Indeed, that coastal erosion has been an issue for decades in Fiji was made clear to me regularly by the sight and stories of sea walls built by ancestors. Where the remains of old constructions, often of coral rocks, remained visible the salient point for one of my interlocutors was not that these walls existed further out to sea than the present wall (indicating a receding shoreline), but rather that they connected contemporary projects of protection with longer histories of interaction between the sea and community. In global climate imaginaries that compel dispositions of anticipation, then, the foreshortening of the relationship between present and future often obfuscates more prevailing emic concerns of those between present and past.[401]

As island studies scholar Baldacchino (2006, p.9) has noted, there is an apparent contradictory tension in globalised climate logics between increasing focus on locale (the island *as* climate change) and the 'threat of all-enveloping homogenisation'. This homogeneous vision of the world rests, inversely, on the refusal of coeval status between 'at-risk' places and the imagined audience of Global North climate *perpetrators*. This refusal, I argue, is part-and-parcel of discursive attempts to morally engage an imagined audience, whilst simultaneously disempowering those at-risk. Following Campbell (2017), then, taking a longitudinal view of the climate change discourse can challenge ahistorical assumptions that perpetuate hierarchical relations of knowledge and power. In the Pacific context, 'climate' arrives as a new stage in an enduring temporal global imaginary that threatens, through reductionism, the future of islanders in both symbolic and material ways. There are analogous climate tropes to colonialist notions of climatic determinism, that deemed the Pacific 'hot, disease-prone and hostile to the development of advanced civilisation'.[402] Later, islands' symbolic representation in global nuclear

[398] See Chapter 1 and 2, and Miyazaki, 2004.
[399] Connell, 2018, p.79.
[400] Butler, 2013, p.156. See also: DeLoughrey, 2018, pp.189-190.
[401] Bryant and Knight, 2019, p.34-35.
[402] Heymann, 2010, p.585.

discourse, as a synecdoche of the wider world, made them apt for 'blowing up' in experiments on planetary destruction.[403]

As Thomas (1994) explores in *Colonialism's Culture*, conceptions of *otherness* in early missionisation in the Pacific rested on notions of time in two main discursive ways. In the first, secular time, racist notions of natural history were employed to posit fixed categories of people defined by civilisational status. In the second, missionary time, an incorporative ideology which rests on notions of salvation posited a mutability between 'pagans' and Christians. Rather than fixing people in time, then, the missionary method used familial metaphors to juggle a sense of dichotomy between a proposed 'shared humanity' and an assumed global hierarchy, thereby framing the Pacific in terms of 'infancy'.[404] I suggest that Rabuka's question to the assembled crowd at COP 23 about showing the impacts of climate change, which began this chapter, reflects an enduring infantilisation of 'at-risk' groups which replaces salvationist notions with 'suffering slots'.[405] Indeed; '*who can do this better than a child?*'. In the anachronistic methodology of climate time-tricking, then, which twins *vulnerability* and *potential* (as in infancy), islanders are left in an unyielding bind of innocence which temporally disempowers them in its attempts to invoke a sense of 'shared humanity'.

Of course, the moral typecasting that pre-supposes the *perpetrators* and *innocents* of climate change is frequently subverted within communities, as in the common admonishment of those *closest* (such as those neighbours who were said to spray chemicals indiscriminately), rather than those necessarily *guiltiest*. In this way, islanders localise – and often elide – the figure of the climate perpetrator and victim through in-group blame that challenges normative climate causality. Using blame to both sense-make in the present, and offer visions of the future, is part of a vernacular approach to the present moment that is viewed as indeterminate and thus endlessly morally tricky. As Robbins (2003) finds in the *Urapmin's* dispensationalist narratives, full knowledge of the present is always deferred to a future time, defining the contemporary moment as always fundamentally unknowable. Previous chapters have highlighted the fact that daily questions take on the weight of final judgement as individuals – much like anthropologists – scan the everyday constantly, with contemporary events being interpreted and reinterpreted 'in the hope (or faith) that they will one day form into a pattern that is meaningful'.[406] Interlocutors' bias towards the far-future as making sense of the present thus highlights the everyday apocalypticism which balances mundanity and sacrality, and brings the voided near-future into sharp focus as a time of intense moral scrutiny. When the devil lurks in most everything (the cashless society,

[403] DeLoughrey, 2018.
[404] Thomas, 1994, pp.125-132. Note: although, of course, there was simultaneity in these framings, as exemplified by the co-existence of noble/ignoble savage stereotypes (Ibid., pp.101-102).
[405] Robbins, 2013.
[406] Robbins, 2001, p.543.

social media, kava drinking, drug-taking), reading signs of the beginning of the end becomes a vernacular approach to the present moment that keeps at bay a prophesised apocalyptic far-future. In this way, it is also part of an enmeshment of climate time into existing village temporalities, including prophetic, circular, and linear time, that I will now explore. These will ground this analysis of chronotypical structuralism in everyday discussions of village life: between slow and fast, which will then lead us into a discussion of post-Winston dis/continuous time as indicative of the multiple temporal readings that shape approaches to Biblical and climate apocalypses.

Slow time

> *Pio: 'Drinking grog like this in the village, it's getting experience in patience. And you will get wise.'*

Time in Fiji is a much discussed, debated, and joked about topic in everyday conversation and in internal valuation and critique: 'Fiji time' coming to encompass a range of aspects; of slowness, lateness, backwardness, a commodity for tourism, or; indeed, a richness of time. In Eräsaari's (2017, 2018) ethnography of a famously 'slow' place in eastern Viti Levu, the historically pre-eminent polity of Verata, he concludes on a structuralist point that *'times are articulated against other times'*, wherein village time, Indo-Fijian time, European time, city time, school time, and other times are all defined spatially. In this sense, when you are in the village; you are also *inside* village *time*. In the duration of my fieldwork, this was made especially clear when visiting NGOs or ministries visited villages and meetings would be held late into the night after the welcoming ceremony, kava drinking, and meal. As one representative of the Ministry of Agriculture told me: 'We go at the *pace* of the villagers'. In another instance, an NGO worker from Suva lamented that she wished she could 'get some work done' but had to attend another late-night meeting at a nearby village, and a *sevusevu* had to be found first. A focus on time-management was of primary importance to Tutu rural training school on the island, and what they referred to as the 'disillusionment period' – the return to the village after finishing their three-year course – implicitly pointed to the temporal pull of village life, deemed as antithetical to individual prospering.

Inoke spoke of his son returning from Tutu on a semester break:

> *'In the beginning, we see lots of changes. But then, as time goes by, falls back into old ways again [laughing]… when he comes back, he's a good boy, goes to Church every day, works hard, but then another two weeks; back to the beginning!' [shaking his head].*

Village time, in this respect, is an oppressive *space* imbued with a sense of cyclical fatalism where individualised blame is reflective of a vision of temporal agency in which only an individual's willpower

can overcome the pull of village rhythms. One afternoon, a friend responded to a visiting family member about how life was in the settlement: 'SOS', he paused, 'Same old shit!' The phrase, perhaps inadvertently, encapsulates both the sense of cyclicality and of entrapment, as if to extricate oneself requires a call for help. In another instance, this feeling of entrapment was reflected in a presentist sense, making decisions about the future appear meaningless. As one night wore on, I haphazardly suggested that a bottle of wine I had brought, lying unopened on the floor, could be saved for another time. Jale, smiling, replied: 'there is no *other* time in Fiji'.

In *slowness*, Weberian virtue-work relations are inverted, reflective of an idealised image of chiefly stasis in Fijian society. Though this idealisation is, of course, always in motion as evidenced by the replacement of the traditional *sevusevu* of *tabua* (whale's tooth) with *yaqona*, the first symbolising the slow, methodical, graceful movements of the whale, replaced long ago with the more every-day, agile, faster land-based form of ceremonial gifting.[407] However, going 'fast' often still invites comment (negatively compared to 'working smart'), with hierarchically infused ideas about chiefly stasis implicit in critiques. For example, when I would be caught trying to 'go fast' whilst packing taro, a buyer remarked in kind admonishment: 'you are wet!', or otherwise in the numerous instances of enforced rest (*cegu*) after interviews or meals, and references to chiefs of past as idealised versions of *slow* power: 'they would just sit and drink!'

'Time so fast': unseasonable weather and time as technique

Increasingly unpredictable and unseasonal weather patterns complicate readings of abstract time, giving rise to the sense that one cannot prepare for the future. Tuwere's (2002, p.39) conception of Fijian time makes the connection between dwelling and abstract time clear, *time* being:

> 'a *place* in which one waits – for the birthing of the fish, for the flowering of the *drala* tree [the *erythrina variegate* tree] or the appearing of the *balolo* [an edible sea-worm, *annelid Euniceviridis]* on the reefs'.

This conception of time as *waiting* echoes Guyer's (2007, p.415) analysis of modern/prophetic time wherein the near-future is to be '*endured by waiting, by identifying, by witnessing',* but where Guyer posits this time as the gap, space, or rupture in time, Tuwere's conception of the *place* in which one waits fills the void between the urgent presentisms and long-term futurisms of the climate change

[407] Simione Sevudredre, former cultural researcher at Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, made this point in a filmed talk at Fiji Museum as part of a video exhibition [visited January 2024].

discourse.[408] Waiting, then, becomes both a temporal strategy and another act of faith, tested especially in the periods of unseasonal weather experienced and perceived as increasingly common: 'expect the unexpected', as one farmer put it. As the title of this section reflects, interlocutors' sense that 'time so fast' now, forms part of a wider sense of displacement as one waits for what does not arrive or is surprised by that which arrives before it is expected. *Waiting*, whilst a malleable concept that can elongate and shrink *post-hoc*, still relies on the twinned phenomena of expectation and eventuation.

In reflecting on what made a farmer successful or unsuccessful, interlocutors related the imperative of doing the 'right thing at the right time'. The phrase '*qalova ua ua na moka*' meaning its inverse: when trying to do something at the *wrong* time you will be unsuccessful.[409] The issue of *time*, as it increasingly led people astray with mal-timed predictions or seemed to be going 'so fast', is always at once experiential *and* connected to ethical engagements with agency, empowerment, and moral reflexivity. In Guyer's (2007) critique of *time as technique*, then, the impact of reductive, dominant time-maps, are their effects on imagination, spheres of possibility, and the ethics of knowledge production. [410] And as Laura Bear notes, implicit in different ontological and epistemological approaches to time are ethical questions:

> *'Phronesis is the ethics of right action that contains accounts of what time is and what it should be used for… [anticipated futures are the result of] both learned experience and ethical representations of the past and future that found our sense of agency'.*[411]

The irony of the Anthropocene is its contradiction that human agency has, for the first time, marked itself on to geology, evidence of humans' impact on the environment. Inversely, the increasingly unpredictable weather – and attendant temporalities that weather infuses – made farmers unable to do the 'right thing at the right time', making unintended impacts a daily occurrence. Where the first notion suggests humans' connection to the environment (not new to Oceanian consciousness, to be sure), the second provokes new senses of disconnect, distrust, and disempowerment.

> *Fieldnotes, Narusa settlement, 16th December 2023*
>
> *Epeli remembered that the last time he planted yaqona on his land during the Covid lockdown; 'it went right up!' We are walking atop the village, in the hills where various farms undulate with cassava, taro, and yaqona. As we walk amongst the grasses in his two-acre plot, clearing*

[408] Rubow and Bird, 2016.
[409] Lagi, 2015, p.111.
[410] Bear, 2016, p.490.
[411] Ibid., p.494.

them to find the small mounds of yaqona sprouts (kasa), we see most of them are brown and dead. He had predicted rain a few weeks ago so had cleared the coconut leaf covering (sasa), exposing the soil, but instead there had been hot sun which had dried the ground. He walks to a nearby mocemoce tree (rain tree), where he has planted kasa in a heap, soon to be transplanted in ringed plots. 'Man, headache', he mutters. On our way back to the village Epeli kerekeres some breadfruit from some other farmers who are atop the tree, to be left at his house later. Back in the village he buys a can of tuna and noodles from the canteen (village shop), mixes it with bele (a common green leafy vegetable) from his garden, and makes lunch.

Forecasting, perceiving, and corroborating time

Forecasting and perceiving climatic events play a role in both the future and present oriented corroborations of time-maps. In interlocutors' verification of climate change, cyclones act as a barometer; if a cyclone had not come that year, it would have been pointed out as evidence *against* climate change, and in a sense the future seemed further away than during times of climatic crisis (to be explored below in relation to Cyclone Winston). Here the distinction between the temporalities of *climate* and *weather* becomes evident, one being the domain of global climate scientists, the other of ordinary people. In the relative short-term (i.e. one cyclone season), evidence *against* climate change could be as temporally brief as a few good months of balanced hot/wet weather. Balance in this context is not only measured in the ratio of hot/wet days, but also in the capacity to forecast changes in weather to plan accordingly. Farmers predominantly used weather forecasts from social media, online sources such as the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), and calls to friends and family in other parts of the island or other islands to make adjustments on the farms; i.e. removing sun-protective *sasa* (coconut fronds) when rain was incoming, pruning leaves of *yaqona* and cassava when high winds or cyclones were forecast, and not spraying grasses that shade young saplings if sun was forecast. However, at times this modern reliance on external sources was coupled with a critique of technological hubris.

Fieldnotes, Delaivuna, 27th February 2024

Kitione: In the olden days, before the weather broadcast, they're using God's natural signs, but most now use the system.

Lusi: We're not using the system, the system is using us! But God himself uses Mother Nature to give the signal, it's like the birds from the sea flying inland

[…]

Kitione: [about climate change] Dubai is creating rain…and now they can't control it.

Here, I think, Dubai stands in for a hubristic reading of climate change, as one example of the perils of *playing God*. Indigenous knowledge is also employed to forecast weather *changes*, and these differed in three important ways to online forecasts: the spatial scale of online forecasts differed from farmers' forecasts, when online forecasts were wrong they invited far more scepticism than when indigenous forecasting signs failed to materialise, and online forecasts' language was more technical and could incite confusion (as in the case of Cyclone Winston, where many people at the time did not recognise terminology such as 'category five', employed rather than the more common measurement of knots, thus failed to perceive its imminent danger). Knowledge of traditional indicators of cyclones is widespread, which often act as corroboration for other forms of forecasting. These indicators included frigate birds flying inland, breadfruit trees with three or more fruits, bees building their nests closer to the base of the tree, banana leaves bending outwards (if broken, they suggest a very bad cyclone), and fish hiding under rocks, making them harder to catch.

Fieldnotes, Narusa settlement, 21st September 2023

Joseph: He called me this morning to tell me it was raining up there [pointing to the mountain]. Cancelled. I said: "I know, I've got my cat here". He was cleaning himself all night. That's my satellite.

Corroboration was commonly found in environmental conditions but also was elicited regularly in social situations, as when I arrived in one house unexpected and was told by my hosts that they had expected a visitor because a black butterfly had come into their house a couple of days prior but had thought it would be their son visiting. In other instances, the death of someone was pre-empted by signs such as dogs howling at night, rats eating up treasured possessions, glass breaking unexpectedly, dogs digging outside the house, or owls crying at night (which could also signify someone hiding, for example, a pregnancy). The sighting of one's spirit *(rai)* is a harbinger of death, also, but can be avoided if the wider community is informed of this premonition.[412]

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is intricately tied up with the traditional seasonal calendar, thus, with increasingly unpredictable weather comes, we may conclude, a decrease in trust of successful outcomes.[413] Frequent reference was made to recent changes as not only evidence of climate change, but also as evidence against 'trusting the land'; for example, the unseasonal weather making it hard to dry yaqona and pandanus, often leading to rotting, thus leading to people turning *away* from

[412] Nabobo-Baba, 2006, p.47.
[413] Lagi, 2015, p.111.

overreliance on land to other economic and educational pursuits. Inversely, negative climate impacts – such as destructive cyclones – could also inspire a turn *towards* traditional forms of resilience; for example, the planting of traditional crops such as *dalo-ni-tana* (traditional taro) and yams after a cyclone. These two turns symbolise the divergent responses to unseasonal or catastrophic environmental events, which point to different levels of belief in human agentic capacity to adapt and/or mitigate negative impacts. It is to this fundamental question of human/divine agency that I will now turn for the remainder of this chapter. To do this, I will explore the memories and narratives of a hugely impactful climatic event, Cyclone Winston, and to its emplacement within Biblical, prophetic, and climatic eschatologies.

Cyclone Winston: the end of *a* world?

Winston was, for many people, when they first heard about climate change, as government agencies, disaster teams, and international aid organisations brought resources to affected communities in the aftermath. In the years since, locally relevant conceptions of causality have fomented which challenge the divergent etic views of Pacific islanders as 'victims' (canaries in the coal mine) or 'villains' (apathetic due to religiosity). This section will thus focus on '*expressions of religiously grounded agency'* which provide glimpses into local ideals of indigenous futurity.[414] The divergent readings of Winston illuminate a spectrum of beliefs regarding the relationship between human agency and divine judgement. Each, in turn, reflects an engagement with temporality that shapes the meaning and effectuality of the near future. To better understand the response to Cyclone Winston, we must first foreground the visceral experience of its impact on-the-ground, on the day, to then explore the spectrum of responses.

Memories of Winston

> *Eroni was staying in Vuna with his father-in-law, his wife's grandmother having just passed away. Roofing iron flew viciously across the village. 'We thought it was our last days, we thought our heavenly father in heaven was very angry with us', he says. After a few weeks of helping to clean up the village, he went up to his farm in Ura estate - everything was destroyed. He looked at his neighbour's house, it had gotten bigger. The roofing iron from Eroni's vale-ni-*

[414] Fache and Fair, 2020, p.245.

teitei (farmhouse) had been used for his extension: 'In that time, you can't claim anything', he laughed.

Marica was in the Mamanuca group of islands, in western Fiji. The toilet was far from their house and during the cyclone they pushed open the door and the sand was everywhere; 'you have to cover your face like that, you can't even reach the toilet, it's very dangerous. You just have to sit on the sand by the house. There is no choice… it lasted the whole night… Breadfruit on top of the roof – Boom! All the breadfruit fell down. These people in the Mamanuca, they don't have land to plant. They depend on breadfruit when it comes'.

Tevita had just been to church when he noticed the winds were starting to pick up. He saw young boys chasing the chickens. Him, his brother, his grandfather, and two of his daughters start to nail roofing iron to the windows. At ten o'clock he peeked out of his front door; his neighbour's wooden house was no longer there. He can barely see twenty metres; it is very dark. In the 'mouth of the hurricane' he is granted two minutes to run across to another house to gather wooden posts. Bringing them back, the men put the posts against their external wall to stop it toppling over. Unexpectedly, the wind comes from the other side: 'I think that's God purpose; it's for us who are trying to run between houses', he says. His brother, who was inside peeling taro, has cut his hand and is bleeding profusely. He hasn't noticed; 'he was shaking'. When the winds subside, he goes outside; most of the trees are felled, roofing iron splayed across the green, an aluminium boat is on top of a still-standing lemon tree. Later, when he goes back inside, he tries to lift the wooden post resting against the wall; he can't. It is far too heavy. He ponders how he was able to ever lift it: 'Because you aren't looking at the post, you're looking at the hurricane'.

Tevita's suggestion that each progressive wind had meaning; 'it's for us who are trying to run between houses', reflects the ways in which cyclones are made into heterogeneous events that tell multiple stories and elicit multiple meanings. As Rubow (2018) remarks of five cyclones that hit the Cook Islands in 2005, these events – much like climate change as *discourse* – come to uphold and challenge certain prophecies, their ostensible homogeneous globality refracting upon contact with local walls, peoples, and narratives. Tevita's reflection speaks of his sense of hubris, of attempting to outmanoeuvre God in trying to uphold the battered walls, but also of untold strength. Memories of Winston abound: the mother who hid with her small daughter inside a cement water tank, shrouded in darkness, praying the walls would hold. The man who saw his neighbours' roof rise up and down three times before flying away. The floating tin seen through fog with torches, appearing like UFOs in the sky. A newly

built house, whose owners had just moved in on Friday and drunk kava, completely disappeared. For many it felt like Judgment Day:

> *Seba: 'I thought it was the end of the world'.*
>
> *Simi: 'How many believed it was their last days… Some, maybe two-three weeks, one month, they can't speak. What they saw, they could not believe; but it was real'.*
>
> *Mere: 'Only God knows what we went through… we don't want the memories to come back', said a woman whose son, when hearing heavy rain at school, prays to God: 'not for Winston'.*

The trauma of the event was exemplified by the phrasing of some; 'it destroyed our minds', and the allusions of others; 'Winston killed her', a man speaking of his mother who died years later. The cyclone's impact was felt many years later, in the way it provided evidence for the *realness* of climate change; highlighting the importance of memories of climate events and their lingering influence on future perception.[415] In this sense, it also marked a turning point in terms of linear time, between *before* and *after* Winston, to which I will now turn.

Winston time: *after* the end of the world

In line with frequently cited redemptive narratives that posit the present as fundamentally liminal, a 'hiatus' waiting for a redemptive future, how is one's orientation towards 'the future' impacted upon by an event, such as a cataclysmic cyclone, which brought the future right to one's doorstep? In the following section I will detail three responses to Winston: fatalism, humility, and pragmatism, a spectrum reflective of the different Biblical texts interlocutors drew reference to and how they perceive Winston along a Biblical time-map (see Figure 12). The spectrum is best understood as reflecting Tomlinson's analysis of narratives of decline in Fiji, wherein Biblical translation distanced *power* from *human agency*, as early Methodist translations of the Bible 'nominalised' *mana*, changing it from a verb (which was variably also used as a noun) to solely a noun; to *have mana*. This, Tomlinson (2006, p.174) argues, changes the original meaning of *mana* as a verb 'denoting effective action' or 'achieving its intended purpose' to one which has historically been understood in the negative aspect; as *mana* having been lost, leading to a 'perpetual lament' regarding the capacity of Fijians (especially chiefs) to effect change, so that the gaining of virtue through Christianity (the *light*) is balanced by the loss of power.[416] Winston then symbolises either a fatalistic Revelations-informed end *as end*, or a

[415] Janif, 2010.
[416] Tomlinson, 2004, 2006. Note: power to effect here is *mana*, which in the original Methodist Fijian translation of the Bible came to mean 'miracles'.

pragmatic Creational-inspired end *as beginning*; the first offering the prophetic vantage point which obfuscates the near-future in favour of apocalyptic signs, the second providing a way for the near-future to be incorporated back into meaningful relation to this ultimate end. In the middle reading, between fatalism and pragmatism, is humility, signified by reference to John the Baptist, importantly a figure who does not see the *end* (but in faith announces Jesus' return).

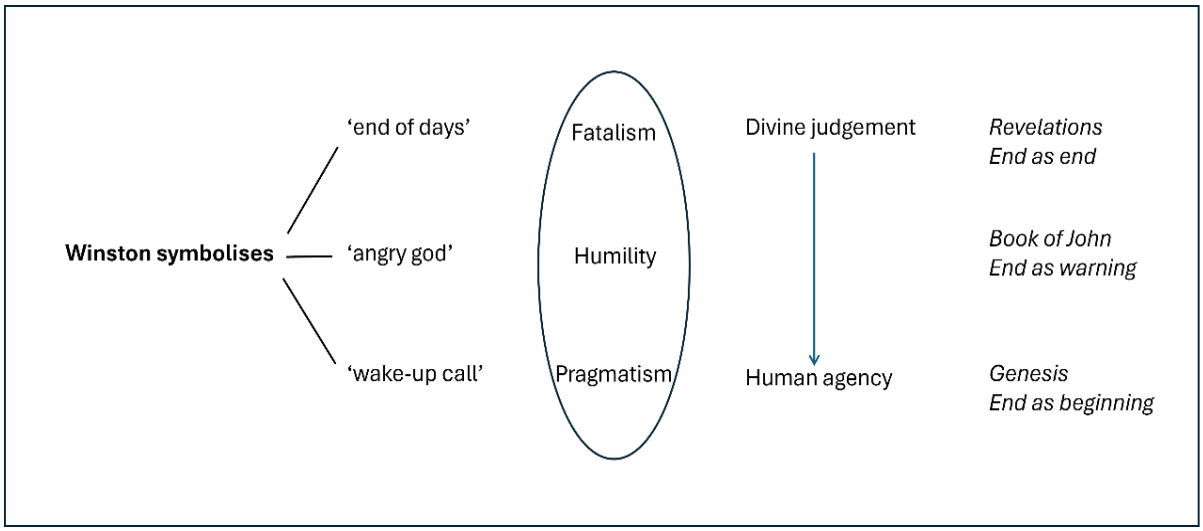

Figure 12. A schematised analysis of responses to Winston as signifying the spectrum between fatalism (apocalypse) and pragmatism (prophecy).

In the first response, fatalism, Winston is viewed as merely part of God's plan in the end of days, of which one can only expect more. Resulting ambivalence to climate change is commonly cited as a result of islanders' Biblical renderings of climatic events (see Rubow and Bird, 2016). However, fatalistic eschatologies that derive from literalist readings of, most prominently, Revelations, do not necessitate that the near-future be entirely obfuscated. Indeed, whilst fatalism offers a vision of prescribed endings, admonishment of others' behaviour – such as when they *should* be praying - reflects the notion that one should be prepared for the end of days, even when it is unalterable.

> *Salote: 'If we compare this time with the Bible, we are near to the last days. Revelations, if you read the first and the last chapter, it really shows what the world is going through… He said to us: I won't tell the time I'm coming, you'll just see what is going on. You have to pray, pray, pray; but they won't, they're just watching games. I feel it, it's happening now. Cos you don't know the hour.'*

In Salote's response, the Book of Matthew's oft-employed quote of not knowing the 'day or the hour', invokes a sense of the Second Coming as inevitable but unknowable. Salote neither points towards ignorance (on the part of humans) nor secrecy (on the part of God) as of ultimate concern, but rather

accepting and engaging with the *mystery*, where not knowing is part of the plan, is of utmost importance. Indeed, this strand of fatalism is so profound that in other ethnographic cases in Fiji some villagers did not leave their house during intense flooding, reflecting that it was an enactment of God's plan. The flood, for these individuals, was a 'purification' that punished the eastern urbanising area around Nadi for adopting Western lifestyles and would re-align Fijian society with Christian ways, highlighting the ways climate change is often secondary to local self-blame and societal criticisms.[417]

In the second response, humility, Winston is indicative of an 'angry God', reflecting back islanders' socio-spiritual failures. Importantly, the resultant blame, admonishment, and repentance is enacted on a local scale. Within Taveuni the southern and northern ends of the island were hit particularly hard by Winston, whereas the central settlements avoided the most destructive winds, indicative to some of the negative divine judgement to agricultural intensification taking place in leasehold lands in the south. As Fache and Fair (2020, pp.243-244) have shown, *blame* in Fijian climate change discourse is often parcelled out to local and known figures, which could include: nearby family deemed climate 'offenders', government ministries, and chiefs. This suggests that interlocutors commonly hold proximity as a key correlate to responsibility and, therein, to the capacity to enact some form of change. In this sense, 'climate blame' can be clearly seen as a political resource capable of attaching to other aims, evidenced by the former Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama's primary target of climate blame: Australia, also being its number one development donor.

The only valid response to this 'warning' was humility then, best exhibited by repentance. Mosese reminisced about the last time he had been to his home village in Vanua Levu, lamenting that he had seen witchcraft (*vakatevoro*) and the '*spirit of jealousy'*:

> *'Back in time, our forefathers really lived the Bible. This time, devil's time! Because of the sin, it is an angry God. Like Sodom and Gomorrah. God says leave this place, but the wife looks back. God says to Lot: leave this place, I will punish it cos of sin, against ten commandments, sin of the flesh; adultery; that's why a lot of people now go to hell… Jesus says to Necodamus: 'You must be born again', and Necodamus is already old… See, fighting everywhere. End of time, it's time, end of times coming. I'm 70 now, everything has not come before. Drugs in Fiji, not before… Lots of stealing going on. All crooked now. That's the devil doing that. And Jesus says to Necodamus: Repent… If everything is right, no climate change; everything will be good in the village. The Indians say 'shidar' – straight – not like this (waving his hand) that's like a snake, snake is the symbol of the devil.'*

[417] Nolet, 2018, pp.67-70.

The third response, pragmatism, is the least prevalent of the responses to Winston, indicative of Tomlinson's conclusions that *power* has long been distanced from human agency. Winston is in this instance both divine judgement of socio-spiritual failure and a rebuke to perceived human arrogance*,* aligned with modernity. Indeed, in the wake of the cyclone, the slogan 'Stronger than Winston' came to be associated, to some Christians, with worldly hubris to such an extent as to invite even further calamitous divine judgement.[418] When aspects of human defiance did show up in my interlocutors remarks, it most often appeared in a form associated with in-group blame; as a divine 'wake-up call' to be responded to by 'being prepared' for future impacts. This humbler approach to *defying* catastrophe is exemplified by returning to ancestral food security measures; planting yams (*tivoli*) and traditional taro (*dalo-ni-tana*). Bryant-Tokalau (2018, pp.68-69) finds similar responses in periods after climatic events where villagers decry the sense of 'complacency' and 'false sense of security', which inspires them to re-focus on TEK and kinship ties. Indeed, many interlocutors referred to this traditional defiance in positive terms, as reflective of the ecological defiance of modern foodways; for example, the plentiful taro that grows in the lower wetland of the central settlements which survived the cyclone. I was told regularly, however, that the post-Winston renewal of interest in 'cyclone foods' was short-lived. The irregularity of cyclones, indeed in the case of 2023-24 no major cyclones hit the group, is arguably a cause of a cyclical tendency from self-reflexive critique to 'complacency' and back again. Citing the wisdom of ancestors regarding preparedness to cyclones, thus, responds *pragmatically* – but not always in practice - to both perceived loss of power *and* virtue through the implicit notion of traditional food as combining resilience, health, and Fijian identity.

In assessing the three schematised responses to Winston, I hope to have highlighted that responses exist along a spectrum between fatalism and pragmatism. These responses, then, are reflective of the conception of time as *waiting*; wherein responses differ in their claims about the near future. The responses also suggest a commonality between modern, climate, and prophetic times, which is their obfuscation of this near future in favour of apocalyptic horizons or catastrophic imminence in which islanders are said to *already* be living in a post-anticipatory future. In assessing the temporality of my interlocutors' causal claims, the relationship between the past (as dark, but powerful) and the present (as light, but powerless), is complicated, however, by the frequently referred to culprit of climate catastrophe: the act of 'going back to old ways'. These acts could include kava drinking (predominantly referenced by 7th-Day Adventists) but were more often termed '*vakatevoro'* (witchcraft), or '*vanua lotu'* (land religion), and were spoken of in hushed tones, most commonly of misguided men. In the

[418] Cox et al. 2018. Note: Similarly, 'worldly responses', like COP 23, have been viewed by some evangelicals as useless and – worse - as suggesting those involved 'love the world, not the Father' (Fache and Fair, 2020, pp.244-45).

following example I will explore how these localised causalities indicate a temporality that blurs the line between power and virtue and suggests that to bring the near future back into play, time again must be tricked.

'It's like Winston has eyes': on prophecy and explanation

> *Fieldnotes, Suva, 3rd May 2023*
>
> *Georgina, my housemate, had spent a month in Macuata province where the villagers from Nabavatu last Christmas had been displaced, living in tents, since Cyclone Yasa in 2020.*
>
> *One day, they told her that in Nabavatu before Winston, men would gather at the cemetery under a large baka (ficus obliqua; small-leaved fig) tree to do witchcraft. The tree's long aerial roots created a dark cave-like area at its base that shaded their activities. She says her mother and grandmother used to call the baka tree: 'vunivuni ni tevoro' (the hiding place of the devil). When Winston came the tree was completely uprooted and turned upside down.*
>
> *Georgina: 'It's like Winston has eyes'*
>
> *Before Winston, there was a preacher going around various villages preaching against witchcraft. He said he foresaw a big wave and flooding. Georgina told me this years after the fact. The next year, those same places the preacher had visited, which practiced witchcraft, were 'finished off' by Cyclone Ana.*

The foreseeing of catastrophic events, told in hindsight of Winston, acts as both prophecy *and* explanation; one speaks of catastrophe to come, the other of the causal mechanism by which that catastrophe differentially eventuates across space. Georgina's variation of the common phrase – 'the land has eyes' – is deployed knowingly, adding to the sense of prophetic inevitability her grandmother instilled in her that the *baka* tree signifies devilry.

This archetypal story, then, of bad deeds eventuating environmental reciprocation, even applied in retrospect has the capacity for anticipation. As explored at the beginning of Chapter 1, knowing who the 'rightful owners' of a plot of land was revealed by environmental reciprocities, and in the same way climatic events come to reveal what was before hidden - 'It's like Winston has *eyes'*. As Hermann and Kempf (2018, p.32) note, knowledge about the future is powerful, which explains in part why climate change discourse has such weight, but within communities' stories can transform feelings of powerlessness into an ability induce change; and 'recapture the future by drawing on powers of indigenous anticipation'. Georgina's story offers two forms of prophetic anticipation: her grandmother's comments on the *baka* tree suggestive of a wider cultural suspicion of dark places; for

example, mangroves (*tiri*) and dense jungle (as explored in the previous chapter). Even the sea can act to shroud devilish behaviours, as I was told of one young man who was said to have prayed out at sea, 'with water up to his neck', which led to his eventual misdeeds. The second orientation is more acutely prophetic, the preacher who went around warning communities against the practices of witchcraft and speaking of a foreseen 'big wave'. As modes of anticipation, they act to assert agency in a climatically uncertain time towards ideas of purification on a local scale.

Georgina's words are echoed across many interlocutors in response to environmental catastrophes, identifying both cause-and-effect in specific locales, rather than in global logics of causality. This local incorporation of climate causality is similarly made in more mundane ways as all aspects of life come to be climatised. These localised causalities of climate impacts are far-ranging: children being picky eaters, the cutting of trees, decline in respect, the banning of corporal punishment, agrochemical intensification, and many more. The 'climatisation of everyday life' then, is both testament to the ubiquity of the climate discourse and highlights its role in moral adjudication.[419] Frequently climate can axiomatically act to critique developments in the local scene, as Marica complained of the increasing scale – and expense – of birthdays in iTaukei society: 'it's like a climate change'. Or the young man who told me: 'I drank a beer, that's climate change!' As the two quotes suggest – whilst in a joking tone – the fact that everything becomes *climatised* is indicative of climate's easy incorporation into a wider trajectory of decline, making climate change a synonym of modernity.[420] Similar processes of incorporation have been found in other parts of the Pacific, as in Rudiak-Gould's (2012) 'promiscuous corroboration' of climate change in the Marshall Islands, whilst similarly pointing to this corroborative stickiness as making climate evermore elusive: 'existing everywhere and nowhere'.[421] Connell (2003) suggests this allows a 'garbage can' logic, in which once isolated phenomena become systematically intermixed with one unifying cause in Tuvalu: the 'garbage can' of climate. In this way, 'mitigating' the potential for harmful climate impacts similarly encompasses a diverse selection of socio-cultural and environmental actions. The category of 'blame' then, localises climate causality in ways that mixed the social and environmental constantly, in effect echoing Rudiak-Gould's assertion that the 'risk society' and the 'traditional' society have merged through the ubiquity of climate 'blame' and 'culpability', writing: 'In the era of anthropogenic climate change, we are all witches'.[422] Ironically, however, as the two quotes above suggest, this is now just as frequently a witch who drinks and throws expensive parties, as it is one who derives their power from ancient practices.

[419] Deriving from the '*oceanisation* of everyday life' (Helmreich, 2011, p.137).
[420] See Tomlinson, 2004 and Rudiak-Gould, 2013.
[421] Rudiak-Gould, 2013, p.115.
[422] Rudiak-Gould, 2015, p.50.

Within the narrative of decline, social and environmental issues can be both cause and effect, echoing Silio's words at the beginning of this chapter: 'this is a world for stealing, climate and thief is the same thing!' In this context, the incorporation of climate change into the general narrative of decline can, inversely, allow for a sense of *blamelessness*. Another interlocutor, a taro buyer and farmer, explained to me, deliberately, that my question asking him to rank environmental issues was irrelevant:

> *Paolo: 'In farming [slowly] in farming [voice lowers] these are the things we have to expect. When you are farming, these are the things you have to expect, you can't stop this! Cyclone! Because it's not man made, it's mother nature, it's God.*
>
> *…*
>
> *And another thing – apart from all this; cyclones, hurricanes, floods, crop diseases – apart from them, there are other things; the dropping of price, and the rising of price, and the last one is the theft: you understand, we have to accept that, you have to accept that, you can't stop that. Even the market price, all this; I'm expecting, one day they'll come – like the cyclone. The journey of farming, from Jan to Dec, you don't just expect the price to be the same, sometimes it goes up to 5 dollars, sometimes it goes up. Like today, it's 2.30 per kg. So we have to expect that. And you have to expect that you're gonna face cyclones, mother nature, flooding, drought; that's all part of it. So, you don't have to be traumatised, you know. See, after Cyclone Winston many of the farmers are traumatised, cos of the big damage; damage has been done, but we can't stop it. It's not man-made – it's God. So, while I'm farming from January to December, I'm expecting all of those, whatever comes…*
>
> *The man that God created, one day he is gonna die. It's the end of his journey on earth. It's all in God's hand. Rise of the sea level, soil erosion, they say it's climate change – for my belief in God, everything has been planned by God.'*

Paolo's disavowal of the question then inclusion of other, socio-economic risks, is indicative of the way in which farmers incorporate both fatalist and pragmatic approaches in conjunction. Where *blame* has, in others, brought the gap/space/rupture of the near future back into moral view, thus tempering fatalism with pragmatism, other interlocutors' refusals to engage in questions, such as those which speak of a hierarchy of risks, have incited its inverse: a sense of the fatalistic *blameless*. Evangelical denominations especially understand climate change as precursory to a time of divine rule, and thus, as one member said to me: 'I have to have faith in His word, His word is eternal. So, I'm not worried. My priority is His Kingdom'. When the thief and climate are the same (as in this chapter's opening

quote from Silio), both are made reflections of God's plan, of which only *waiting* – in its passive reading – is an appropriate response.

Farming outlooks

Whilst concern in the ability to make a living from farming as a result of climate change was common (fourteen out of twenty-three respondents being either 'very concerned' or 'concerned'), these responses balanced explicit fatalism with reference to creation, inspiring an environmental stewardship.

> *Savenaca: 'It's according to our way of life, we are polluting - everything is done by God - God's creation - we cut the trees, we never plant trees, some of the people are using the chemicals in the creek, not using the duva [traditional plant used to stun fish], they are polluting the water… it's being done by humans, we are trying to destroy the creation made by God...'*

> *Noa: 'In the creation, in Genesis, everything was separated - light from dark - sea from earth - Adam from soil and from Adam he made Eve. He put them in the Garden of Eden. I'll give you everything - be dominant - so you should be dominant over everything - take care of everything - that's my understanding - they give us life, we give them life - we are more connected to each other, we should respect each other, we can't survive without them and they can't survive without us.'*

These responses suggest a view of the *end as beginning*, a pragmatism inspired by creational reciprocity, akin to the ecological *veivakaturagataki* (manner of a chief) described in the previous chapter. Indeed, the vast majority of respondents (20 out of 25) responded positively to the statement: *'future generations should get into farming as it is a good way to make a livelihood'*. In some cases, the uncertainty of the future, and precarity of the present, itself compelled these positive responses:

> *Lavenia: 'Because we don't know what the future holds, but for me it's safe, if you have land, if you're working, at least you have a backup […] One of my school mates was a teacher, he left teaching to go into yaqona farming; he then bought one twin cab [pickup truck], he would never get that in teaching - from there' [pointing to the land around her].*

The others who disagreed pointed to the small size of their land as an impediment, and instead encouraged their sons to get an education, and viewed the farm as the 'back-up' if they proved

unsuccessful. Out of the five farmers who 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement, four had four or more kids, suggestive of the connection between diminishing land size with increased offspring and a resulting negative sense of the future viability of farming livelihoods.

Reasons for a positive response ranged from village lifestyle ('easy living', 'you are your own boss', 'never struggle, like other jobs; we can rest, use your time, you boss yourself') to the good incomes possible, often contrasted with struggle of waged life ('lot of people going overseas, picking apples, picking oranges, but when you stay in Fiji the farm is always there for you to survive', '$50 may only be $10 now, there may be a time when they can't buy anything!') One lady offered a balance of the two perspectives, hinting at the social pressures of the village:

> *Selina: 'I agree they should get into farming, but we want them to be educated farmers, 'cos in the olden days they would drop out of school…some they just harvest their yaqona and dalo and drink…be your own boss, the money you get from farming you make more than from a job. You just have to be true to yourself and you'll reap the reward.'*

From the diverse responses regarding viable near-term futures, clearly a key terrain in which all of these visions conflict and contrast is that of *time*: its use, its misuse, and the moralisations that are imbued within the choices to be made. Importantly, *'if you have land'* as Lavenia states, then your only constriction is *time*: navigating between the cyclical fatalisms of the village, apocalypticism of literalist Biblical prophecies, and the pragmatic fatalisms of farmers, one must choose each time anew which to inhabit.

Time after Winston: the indeterminacy of the near future

Fieldnotes, Qarawalu, 27th February 2024

'Pan still there', Krishnil says, as we pack taro into flour sacks. We are confused. He points to the corner of a ledge, overlooking a steep valley which descends to the sea below. Behind a water tank is a toilet cistern, out in the open. We feign a small step over the foundation (yavu) of a house no longer standing, destroyed by Winston. His plan is to rebuild one day once his children are through tertiary education, and we take a pause from packing to stand 'inside' his house.

The act of remembering Winston is, in and of itself, an act of continuance – rather than finality - after what for many interlocutors *felt* like *the end of the world.* The event's meaning and causality can be continually modified; for example, invoked as part of a project of moralising hindsight (as in Georgina's words about the Nabavatu villagers) or as further evidence of a fatalistic future. In a good year for

farming (the beginning of 2024), however, the 'urgent presentisms and long-term futurisms' of climate change – made *real* by Cyclone Winston - are rendered harder to identify - its temporality masked by seasonal fluctuations and patterns of variation in cyclonic activity.[423] Asynchronous temporalities across climate *presentism*, land-based *waiting*, and Biblical *end of days*, may help to explain the conflicting references made to Genesis which point to the present as both: antediluvian time (as in: before the flood) and covenant time (after the flood).[424] Where one suggests a world nearing its end, the other posits a world after the end (see Figure 13). In many cases, subtle cynicism around the topic of climate change and its urgent presentism circled the *failures* of endings.

Figure 13. Photographs of two temporalities in Vuna village. Left: the ruins of a house destroyed by Cyclone Winston with visible pillars, stairs, and latrine. Right: lali drum in the foreground which announces daily village and church meetings.

When Luke, the most vocal cynic of climate change that I met, spoke of the apocalyptic 'presentisms' of climate change discourse he expressed his felt shame of the COP 23 process, and of climate finance which Bainimarama sought, quoting the Bible to adjust *immoral* behaviour to encompass both a critique of village life *and* global climate politics:

> Luke: '*I mean they talk about cyclones. My grandfather spoke about very bad cyclones in his time. We've even had coconut trees that leaned over, and then started growing again… It's just a natural process… They've made it into a chaos… this is why I talk about the Bible because the Bible warns us about this. This has happened so many times in history… The scriptures says:*

[423] Rubow and Bird, 2016, p.162. See also: Sillitoe, 2022.

[424] Literalist interpretations of the Noahic 'rainbow covenant' are widespread across the Pacific (see Queensland Synod News, 2008). In Genesis 9:11-17, God's words to Noah are: *'I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth… I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth'*. In a literalist interpretation, these words offer a form of reassurance that the islands of the Pacific should be safe in the face of changing climate. As Fabi, working in parliament, remarked to me, he accepted that the weather had changed from when he was younger, but could not accept that the world would be flooded again: 'Because I am a Christian… For us, that's the truth. Then there's the scientific truth… Every time we see the rainbow, we're okay. That's the promise'.

from the sweat of thy brow, thy will eat. Meaning, you work for your money, not somebody else work for you, it doesn't work like that.'

Luke had experienced a rapturous event in recent years and been inspired to change his ways wherein his building of a new church was an act of inter-generational reciprocity: 'the promise that He made to our ancestors, that He comes back'. The inter-generational promise of return, and the promise of punishment for the sins of forefathers suggests the pervasive logic of reciprocity.[425] As one of the staunchest dispensational premillennialists I encountered in Taveuni, his building of a church made sense as an act of both return (his father and grandfathers had not been Christian) and of preparation (for Judgement Day). But his awards – Farmer of the Year plaques adorning the walls – and commitment to his business were less apocalyptic, and instead more Weberian in their connection between work and virtue. Luke did not explicitly refer to work as 'punishment', in a post-Fall reading, but regularly admonished those who 'drink grog all bloody night', signalling not only kava's role in the 'devil's toolbox' as a pastime, but also its role in *stealing time itself*. Indeed, the terrain of time continues to be a site at which criticisms can be laid on farmers, but in Luke's tempering of these he was keen to stress: 'they've got a lot of catch-up, it's not their fault', adding a temporal map suggestive of developmental thinking, echoing Father Isoa's comment – which at the time took me by surprise – 'we're a young country'. In positioning Fiji in a time *before*, it is decidedly not *innocence* claimed, but rather a proximity to sin assumed - to the original causes of temporal disempowerment which point to the virtue of work in 'catching up'. In comparing Luke with the people he criticises, it is interesting to note that his attacks circle around the idea of being withdrawn from the market economy, whilst he actively engages with it on a national, and irregularly international scale, in what Robbins' (2001) has highlighted is a seeming contradiction between everyday engagement and millenarian belief. Indeed, in many interlocutors the expectation that the world was soon to end did not eventuate a withdrawal from the world, but rather a highly moralised reading of the everyday which made it especially important to engage with. This central contradiction suggests what a focus on the temporal dimensions of climate apocalypticism can offer; in rather than equating fatalistic belief with withdrawal, notions of *finality* can indeed inspire action in the short-term.

Time and blame are intricately tied up in these cynical readings of Fiji's position within a global climate discourse. When *everything can be* climate change, invocations of hypocrisy are similarly numerous, as governments, NGOs, and individuals shirk responsibility, reframe themselves as victims, and/or produce ahistorical accounts of events to enact a vision of climate change that always points outwards.

[425] Ryle, 2010, p.74.

It is a climate change that disappears the near future in favour of the image of horizon, thereby making ghosts of the people it claims to champion. As one staff member at an NGO opined:

> *'A lot of things are seen as climate change now, does that mean that hurricanes and cyclones never happened in the past, and very strong ones?'*

The indeterminacy of decline (as detailed in previous chapters) here extends to an indeterminate ending; where the future – akin to history *not* being the past – is *not* everything that is to come, but rather a socio-political terrain which can be claimed through prophecy but also can be lost via disconfirmed prophecy (as in the relocated village not yet underwater). When the end does not arrive on time, imminence can be replaced 'by a more *diffuse* promise of the future Happening'.[426] Exploring narrative endings, then, provides a view of narrative accounting in its totality, prophecy (both worldly and godly) coming to shape the present and the past. The etic prescription of a 'Fijian village' chronotype (as in the introductory anecdote from COP 23), *an urgent presentism based on a destructive futurity*, obfuscates multiple and overlapping temporalities; primarily the concept of waiting which allows for 'the near future [to be] theologically recaptured'.[427] This recapturing has real-world implications, wherein young villagers' urban and white-collar aspirations can be seen, in a pull-push model, as an expression of developmental impulse *and* the twinned effects of spatio-temporal disempowerment: arable land shortages and chronotypical hegemony.[428]

This chapter has focused on the indeterminate logic of *waiting*, which acts as a counterpoint to global logics of 'enforced presentism' and 'fantasy futurism'.[429] The implicit argument, thus, is that the discursive effects of climate change temporality – its speeding up, truncating, and foreshortening of time – are experienced and negotiated by farmers in Taveuni in their assessments of their own resilience. However, as I have explored, the increasing unpredictability of seasons and its impact on traditional seasonal markers, challenges many of my interlocutors' sense of time as 'a *place* in which one waits'.[430] Where one's *location in time* becomes harder to identify – either through climatic variation (this chapter), or indeed market fluctuations (Chapter 3) – a realignment of knowledge production towards the future allows for realignment with the ongoingness of everyday life. Where an etic view of islands within climate change discourse posits them as an anachronism that renders space

[426] Worsley, 1971, xx, *italics* added.
[427] Rubow and Bird, 2006, p.164.
[428] As the *matanivanua* Vuna told me: 'We can't just rely our life on the land; because we know a hurricane is going to come again... See, the border is here, it will remain this border forever, and the population is increasing: how are they gonna live? How are they gonna survive? So, they have to find a way out.'
[429] Rubow and Bird, 2016.
[430] Tuwere, 2002, p.39.

into time, as in the world's 'anticipated future',[431] the emic view shares an understanding of the future as *already* prophesised also but infuses the present with moral reckoning through a conceptualisation of time as *waiting*, in a reciprocal, expectant, and meaningful sense. Within this terrain of temporalities, various chronotypes overlap to produce a widespread *pragmatic fatalism* wherein climate change is but one more aspect of prophetic futurity that requires daily reckoning.

Conclusion

Whilst in colonial and capitalist time, the village symbolised the traditional past, evidenced by protectionist land policy and the cooperative movements of early market incursions into village life, in this chapter I have tried to show how the climate change discourse frames the Fijian village anew, this time as the global future. In both etic temporal framings, the village is never coeval with the world out there, infusing village temporality with the logics of temporal scarcity, from capitalist 'time is money' to climate's 'time is running out'. Thus, when an interlocutor remarked of others' lack of interest in tree-planting, calling them 'sleeping giants', this brief phrase – playing on the name of a popular tourist garden in western Viti Levu – encapsulated both a sense of lost power and lost *time*.

Villagers employ different time-maps to make sense of increasingly unpredictable weather, and in doing so construct blame narratives than often corroborate, overlap with, or outright contradict climate discourse. Localised blame, I have suggested, should not be viewed as anti-science, or requiring 'climate education', but rather as a fundamental, reflexive component of an agentic incorporation of climate change into the moral lifeworld of villagers. In this way climate change both transforms and is transformed by local moral frameworks, with each variously challenging, affirming, and transforming the other. The *climatisation of daily life* that makes moral significance a constant feature of social and environmental changes reflects climate's ubiquitous, God-like character, wherein if you have *climate on your side*, your ability to stake moral claims increases exponentially. This moral role, as other ethnographies of climate change in the Pacific have shown, connects climate change with notions of virtue and sin and therein motivates faith-based action.[432] Where etic visions of islands from the climate change discourse emphasise original innocence (as low emission states, and unjustly impacted by climatic effects), interlocutors in Taveuni frequently cited lost *virtue* and *power* as the cause of resulting guilt, shame, and blame, coagulating into prospective momentum of a local character.

[431] DeLoughrey, 2019, p.166 & p.179.
[432] Fache and Fair, 2020.

As this chapter has shown, the spectrum of responses to climatic events, such as Cyclone Winston, indicates a subliminal choice between innocence/disempowerment and guilt/agency. Within this spectrum is an assessment of the capacity of human agency and the extent to which it can be said to mitigate divine judgement. This is perhaps where we can return to Tomlinson's (2004, 2006) distinction between virtue and power, as my interlocutors' *pragmatic fatalism* suggests, where one can (and should) be virtuous, this does not necessarily mean that one will be able to effect change or regain *lost* power. However, within the timeframe of the 'morally dangerous' near future, 'doing good' can also be re-ascribed as responsive pragmaticism, a particularly *vanua*-centric ideal of *waiting* to do the 'right thing at the right time'. As seasons change, however, the Fijian concept of time becomes another site in which negative reciprocity, as one's crops fail or their plans are scuppered, comes to bear down on farmers' sense of their own socio-spiritual standing. When *'climate and the thief is like the same thing'*, stolen time is a constant threat to farmers, who negotiate this temporal terrain and draw on time-maps that often subvert narratives of disempowerment, bringing forth a near future that is fecund with meaning and moralism.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have described the ways farmers in Taveuni navigate identity with persistent reflections on the past. Within each empirical chapter I have attempted to thread the past's enduring referential quality to elucidate processes of identity formation and socio-political futurisms. I have described how the past can be invoked to strengthen iTaukei agency in contrast to victim narratives of land loss, economic marginalisation, and climate change. Throughout I have argued that indigenous knowledge-making practices frequently assert temporal dynamism, as pasts are *read* in the future, and the future is made an *aspect* of the past. Drawing on rich Fijian ethnography of land and historicity,[433] this thesis thus contributes to the historiography of the Pacific,[434] wherein syncretism is self-reflexively engaged by interlocutors to produce a past-oriented futurity. The sociality of the present comes, then, to be defined by the tensions inherent in consuming contradictory ideologies, one of which – in the post-Winston era – is the notion that the world has ended *and* life goes on.

Whilst structuralist dichotomies are what the stuff of Pacific ethnography is made of, my thesis has aimed to challenge this claim of objective 'choice-making', to one which foregrounds subjectivity and self-reflexivity when discussing issues of land, exchange, ecology, and prophecy. Drawing on the central notion that two statements that contradict do not necessarily falsify each other, I have attended to the self-aware deployment of common dialectics, for example, tradition/modernity, in ways that complicate linear temporalities. In so doing, I have taken inspiration from historiography (as the study of the making of history) to analyse temporally compressed ethnographic reflections on issues as far reaching as historical land sales, contemporary theft, racialised economic identities, and traditional ecological principles. Throughout these chapters I have attempted to show how structural categories are commonly exceeded, rather than acceded to, and thus challenge historicist notions that disallow simultaneity. Indeed, after Cyclone Winston, the future appears closer than ever, the contemporary moment never lingering long enough to be much understood. In turn, I have suggested, the past becomes even more proximate, as its remnants continue to provide explanatory dialectics from which to organise moral life in a rapidly changing world. This provokes new terrains for cultural contradictions and subversions. In the case of Tutu farmers who draw on *vanua*-centric ideals of ecological harmony this puts them at odds with the rhythms of village sociality. The stealing of taro and kava causes deeper questions to be asked of rightful exchange and historical binds of kinship. Whilst many of these chapters have reflexively focused on the past, it is towards the future that prophecies – of Biblical,

[433] Abramson, 2000, Kaplan, 1995, Lagi, 2015, Miyazaki, 2004, Tomlinson, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, Toren, 1988, 1999a, 1999b.
[434] Chappell, 1995, Sahlins, 1993b.

Fijian, and climate varieties – coalesce to add to the discursive relevance of that which has come *before*.

In Chapter 1, I explored indigenous conceptions of the past as implicated in the present in ways that challenge determinate notions of land tenure and categorical forms of power and authority, evoking a sense of the enduring past as being constitutive of indigenous presents and futures. In Chapters 2 and 3, I explored the ways the past is self-reflexively engaged to critique the present, as tensions over crop thefts in an increasingly individualised economy bubble over and interlocutors' reflections on the supposedly post-racial identity of *Fijians* frequently makes the notion of class-based unity appear ever elusive. In this way, historically spatialised socio-economic landscapes persist to re-produce a sense of *unevenness* rather than unity. In Chapter 4, I show that increasing awareness of infertile soils leads to new syncretic associations between Biblical, iTaukei, and ecologically harmonious pasts, which variously draw on ideas about commercial individualism, spiritual awakening, and ecological conversion in training young farmers to return to the land. Finally, in Chapter 5, I emphasise this thesis' implicit theoretical concern with time to explore how interlocutors negotiate local conceptions of time with unseasonable and unpredictable temporalities. Whilst this thesis, thus, only addresses climate change directly in its last chapter, it does so to reflect the emic apprehension of climate change as concerned with – rather than just environmental anthropology - anthropologies of time, prophecy, blame, historicity, and religion.

<u>Returning to my research questions</u>

The following two questions served as the basis underlying the ethnographic explorations:

- How is the past employed to frame contemporary socio-moral concerns in Taveuni during a period of environmental decline?

- How do farmers' imaginaries of the past and future impact upon the ways in which they manage environmental decline in the present?

In response to the first, returns of the past are clearly emphasised by interlocutors as central to the protection and endurance of iTaukei futures. Agency is reassumed with reference to the past in the case of historical land sales and in contrasting *vanua*-centric ecological ideals with the unsustainability of modern agricultural practices. The discursive past can also act as a response to the perceived failures of modernity's promise, where the idealised virtuousness of village life is counterposed with the perils

of urban living. In this way, spaces (as in villages and outer islands) are paradoxically temporalised as *before* - an orientalised synecdoche of Fiji's past - but similarly *after* - when modernity has been said to have come and gone already - leaving behind remnants and ruins in its wake. The resulting ambivalences and moral confusions, exemplified within contemporary exchange, mean that conceptual categories of traditional/modern and inside/outsider frequently break down. Therein, anti-social behaviours are integrated within trajectory analysis that posits a moral world in decline, evidenced by soil infertility, reduced taro yields, and corroborative climate *ends of the world.*

In response to the second, I have argued that where decline and prophecy speak of predictable gloom, the future may well strengthen the past (with calls of 'going back' contrasting with modernity's failures), but also, perhaps surprisingly, gives moral import to the present. When everything is *climatised*, then, the ethical implications are that past wrongs are being justly worked out *now*. It is not a stretch to suggest these returns are similarly read as protective, rather than destructive, in which case there is still much that can be done. One is not a 'victim' if they maintain their agentic capacity. Environmental decline as indicative of localised sin, then, draws on both visions of the past (as both ecologically centric *and* sinful) and future (as similarly heavenly *and* apocalyptic), and reads into everyday acts evermore atomised moralisations. The past and future, as aspects of a deeply moral narrative, are frequently used as resources to make sense of unpredictability, elucidating how narrativisation acts not arbitrarily, but rather to maintain the temporal congruity of place and therein the moral agency of its inhabitants.

In each question, 'environmental decline' comes to define a central tension between past, present, and future. In ethnographic terms I have explored the sense of decline as a socio-ecological *affect* amongst interlocutors – evidenced by the perception of increasing immorality (in Chapter 2) and declining crop yields (particularly in Chapter 4) – which is both sign and cause of climate change. But notions of decline are also frequently employed to compare iTaukei with other groups, primarily the developmental successes of Indo-Fijian communities (as in Chapter 3's focus on the taro market). In this sense, claims of 'decline' also serve a socio-political function that speaks of redress to structural issues and perceived inequalities. Inversely, decline can be framed – rather than iTaukei communities not 'keeping up' with modernity – as resulting from the attempts to do so, which leads to a decline in traditional, *vanua*-centric values. Following Thomas' (1993) structuralist analysis of *tradition* as diametrically opposed to *modernity*, I have shown that climate change attaches to an enduring notion of cultural decline and thereby aligns itself *with* tradition *against* modernity. Being *vakaturaga* (in the manner of a chief) becomes ecologically minded, aligning indigenous identity with environmentalism and – perhaps inadvertently – upholding notions of indigenous paramountcy. In this sense, indigenous

claims of 'decline' are culturally conservative, and must be understood as constitutive of long histories of engagement with modernity, of which climate change *continues* a *tradition*.

Thesis contribution to anthropologies of *climate time*

This thesis contributes to the anthropology of climate change and its indigenous reception in the Pacific, with a particular theoretical focus on the temporal aspects of climate's 'worlding' effects.[435] Grounded in indigenous epistemology, this thesis advances a theory of future-making wherein individuals - during a time of climatic unpredictability – locate themselves within a past-oriented temporal framework. Drawing on the anthropology of time, I focus on the ways in which this 'orientation' – as that which connects the future and action – challenges the universalising teleology of modernity and climate change.[436] In so doing, I build on ethnographies of the Pacific that deal with climate as a 'travelling discursive reality', which intersects with religion, time, agency, and responsibility.[437] These studies have identified the knowledge negotiations that result, which encompasses processes of: translation, contradiction, equivocation, power, asymmetries, and can frequently create terminological 'islands' that advance specific notions of climate responsibility/agency and vulnerability/risk.[438] In turn, climate threatens to perpetuate – in a new terrain - the dominance/resistance paradigm that Sahlins (1993b) decried of Pacific future-making. Instead, rather than viewing this period of 'going back' as pure 'resistance' to climate modernism (as in a form of 'traditionalism') I have shown how syncretic modes of apprehension offer eco-theological responses to linear, secular, scientific discourse and how this approach centralises notions of reciprocity, faith, and morality.

Drawing on anthropologies of the future and poststructuralist discourse theory, I have explored how climate's rhetoric of crisis is incorporated within local temporal frameworks and therein maintains indigenous moral agency.[439] I have focused on the issue of time as fundamental to political empowerment because climate *futures*, within a global discursive regime, frequently elide the political aspects of knowledge formation that frame time as *running out* to bolster discourses of risk, vulnerability, and their attendant theories of change.[440] As the ethnography suggests, interlocutors draw on the centrality of their *faith* to make sense of climate change within an eschatological

[435] de Wit and Haines, 2021, de Wit et al., 2018, Rudiak-Gould, 2013.
[436] Bryant and Knight, 2019.
[437] Crook and Rudiak-Gould, 2018, de Wit et al., 2018.
[438] Garcia et al., 2022, Kelman, 2018.
[439] Bryant and Knight, 2019, Berlant, 2007.
[440] Nightingale et al., 2020.

timeframe. Thus, my ethnographic contribution suggests that a faith-based approach needs to reflect indigenous concerns over Biblical prophecy and climate change as being mutually co-constitutive, which re-ascribes the near future with moral meaning, and bridges the discursively-produced gap between 'enforced presentism' and a 'fantasy futurism'.[441] Indeed, discourse analysis has shown how apocalyptic imaginaries underly climate's powerful resonance, defined by a sense of 'discrete rupture' that posits climate catastrophe in an 'ontological vacuum'.[442] Conversely, I have shown that interlocutors frequently refer to apocalypse as part of everyday meaning-making in ways that, paradoxically, mobilise a sense of urgency in a *regularised* way. In other words, continuity and rupture are rendered aspects of each other, fostering an enduring sense of *waiting* for the end.

In the everyday apocalypticisms within Taveuni, wide ranging social and ecological changes are incorporated into a prophetic reading of time that balances fatalism as an orientation towards the future with a pragmatism that 'expects everything'. As the past's endurance in the present makes for indeterminate readings of an open future (as explored in relation to oral history in Chapter 1), so too does the moralisation of the present open up the near future to undetermined continuances, as ultimate judgement is persistently pushed away. This ethnography has shown that Biblical literalism often aligns with climate change fatalisms in ways that make for climate's easy corroboration of, and incorporation into, local narratives. However, subversion of climate change's proposition of finite resources – importantly, *time* – is concurrently an adherence to local temporal frameworks *and* a criticism of modern hubris. We do not know *the hour*, after all. Where Guyer (2007) has offered this reason for the 'voided' nature of the near future within prophetic thinking, my ethnography suggests otherwise: that this time is undetermined and remains open, rendering it fecund with moral meaning. It is when the work of righting the wrongs of the past is done *before* ultimate ends, but with no expectation of changing the prophecy. Climate change is matter out of time, it is of the past, *ghostly*, and temporally dislocating, of the future, *anticipatory*. The response, as I have shown through these chapter's progression from oral history to contemporary critique to future-making, is a continuation – rather than a radical rupturing – of iTaukei conceptions of past, present, and future, as recurring, dynamic, and entangled. In this way, it can offer a substantial critique to modernist conceptions of time that, in its attempts to maintain linearity, creates a shadow-realm of doubt, regret, wonder, what-ifs, and phantom hope. Past-oriented futurity, then, suggests the way interlocutors reintegrate the representational ghosts that have evaded categorical incorporation, and the ostensible contradictions

[441] Rubow and Bird, 2016.
[442] Bettini, 2013, p.65.

of the Fijian postcolonial condition. These ghosts are not merely *outside* of time but occupy their own temporality and, therein, offer alternative ways to temporalise - and moralise - the present.

Theoretical contributions and future research

My three main theoretical contributions are connected by an underlying concern with notions of *continuity* and *rupture* as it relates to contemporary issues in Fiji. Firstly, emerging from a socio-cultural study of historiography, I have shown that multiple socio-political claims to property can coexist with reference to varied temporalities. In turn, jural categorisations often fail to capture the diverse ways land borders are conceptualised and practically navigated, which reflect indigenous epistemological practices. Throughout, the underlying notion of *continuity* has been employed as reflective of Fijian land-based oral histories, but – due to Taveuni's uniquely *alienated* landscape – juxtaposed with the sense of discontinuity, rupture, and fissures. I have suggested that Taveuni's comparatively low level of indigenous land (54% compared to national average of 88%) and high level of freehold land (33% in both freehold and leasehold arrangements, compared to national average of 8%), makes it a unique site from which to study how land tenure – and its associated level of historical alienation – maps on to notions of historical continuity/rupture within the Pacific.[443] I have shown, thus, that where discontinuities arise in the landscape, exemplified by different tenure systems and boundary lines, these act as – rather than strict delineations of sociality – openings for self-reflexive engagements. I have suggested that whilst some scholars have posited tenure as being of utmost importance to conservation efforts in Fiji through its focus on communal buy-in and enthusiasm,[444] there are also inversions of this logic, as exemplified by the anti-chemical discourse's focus on individualistic tenure security to ensure the endurance of youth's environmental motivation. This suggests that the syncretic way indigenous and freehold lands are viewed (defined by an inter-generational outlook), in contrast with leasehold's *quick profits*, complicates a simple reading of rupture/continuity as mapped on to landscape. As I have shown, freehold lands are frequently held communally in familial arrangements, and indigenous lands are – inversely - increasingly sites of attempts to enclose and secure. Thus, this thesis had advanced a theory that continuity between conceptual worlds (indeterminacy/determinacy, requesting/stealing, insider/outsider, chemicals/organic, climate/prophecy) is frequently a question that is best understood as a temporal emplacement: where one situates themself within narratives of decline and/or restoration. In employing these structural oppositions then, I have shown that my

[443] SPREP, 2020.
[444] Keppel et al., 2012.

interlocutors frequently *use* historiography to remake not only the past, but also the present and the future.

Further research in a comparative mode may well highlight these themes to a greater extent, with Taveuni's particularities coming into sharper focus with reference to those places which exhibit a more fundamental sense of continuity: of land and of indigenous ownership. In the longer term, a larger project involving scholars who breach the constructed ethnographic divides of the Pacific (Melanesia-Polynesia-Micronesia) would be advantageous in illuminating salient points of contact and friction regarding the key topic addressed in this thesis: notions of *continuity* during an era defined by *change*. This approach scales up the challenge made by the New Melanesian History movement on New Melanesian Ethnography to incorporate historical processes into ethnographic analysis.[445] In so doing, it confronts the persistent anthropological chasm that has existed between Melanesian literature (see Introduction) – which focuses on small language groups and their kinship structures – and the more widely conceived of 'acculturation studies' of the eastern Pacific islands, analysed in relation to global Christianity, post-colonial racial politics, and the market.[446] Dialogic research which encompasses these two analytic modes is increasingly required as contemporary discursive regimes recapitulate notions of ontological rupture across the Pacific.[447]

This thesis has furthered a theory of indigenous self-reflection which moves dialectics beyond historic boundaries,[448] and temporal epochs (tradition/modernity),[449] towards a focus on indigenously described idioms of continuity and change. A wider project of Pacific anthropologists could further attend to the modern regionalisms enacted in climate discourse which frequently disempower island communities.[450] As Rudiak-Gould (2013) showed, cultural theories of risk internalise these fatalistic narratives in diverse ways. One way to analyse internal trajectory analysis that I have highlighted throughout this thesis is attention to idioms of change: things which are 'not like before'. Tracing socio-historical processes across the Pacific islands in a comparative mode can take inspiration from Jolly's (1992) work, which showed that different Pacific cultures imagine continuity and rupture in different ways. These cultural discontinuities can further accentuate notions of personhood entangled in specific places. As 'kinship is history',[451] the Taveuni case has highlighted how 'mixed' peoples also *make* kinship through history, such as the faith-based narrative of the Battle of Wairiki. It similarly

[445] See Thomas, 1994, Strathern, 1988.
[446] See Ryle, 2010 (on Christianity), Presterudstuen, 2014 (on race), Ravuvu, 1988 (on the market).
[447] Crook and Rudiak-Gould, 2018.
[448] Sahlins, 1963, Thomas, 1989.
[449] Toren, 2010.
[450] DeLoughrey, 2019.
[451] Leach, 2004.

highlights how criticisms of contemporary village life, such as the one made by a female housemate that: 'blood is not important anymore', provide self-reflective glimpses into notions of change. Where comparative work can be beneficial, thus, is investigating cultural idioms which denote kinship (as found variously in family, the land, and the church) and loss (whether described in bodily, social, or spiritual terms) as reflections of place and its history.

Where the Taveuni case has provided a relative 'anomaly' in Fiji, as having higher than average levels of historic land alienation, it provides a good starting point for discussions of land's role in defining sociality. Where Melanesian literature has offered varied way land is figured in apprehending social relations,[452] future studies could investigate how varied levels of land alienation *within* Fiji impact upon perceptions of historical continuity which challenge generalised visions of processual culture in *the way of the land*.[453] A more systematic approach to notions of loss, which take it as fundamentally ambivalent,[454] will also highlight differences internal to Fiji across land tenure systems and, importantly, racial perspective. As Bamford (2007) comprehensively showed, land as a central point of attachment shifts notions away from genealogy and sociality towards the more-than-human aspects of descent theory. In this way, research which takes as its starting point that land and personhood are entwined can, across varied land tenure patterns and levels of alienation, investigate the way iTaukei *and* Indo-Fijians variously imagine the possibilities of the present and future as dependent on land's availability, whilst attending to the particular socio-histories of each people and their attendant theories of risk.

Further cross-tenure comparisons, which build on the conception of indigenous and freehold lands as conceptually similar in comparison to leasehold as fundamentally at odds with socio-environmental concern, could also further elucidate the environmental, social, and ritual practices which form part of agricultural reasoning. Both survey and ethnographic data have suggested that tenure type and tenure security play a role in decision-making on farms. But ethnographic data suggests that the delineations of tenure type frequently fail to neatly distinguish spatio-subjectivities in the ways one might expect, as social, kinship, and cultural obligations persist. Thus, the combination of ethnographic and survey data is suggestive of a dynamic system that does not clearly distinguish socio-environmental perception across land tenure. Rather, with an eye towards future research, individuals frequently re-define land tenure types from *the ground up* (for example, enclosing indigenous land or communalising freehold plots), making distinctions between types less clear-cut and, often, more a product of inter-

[452] Riles, 1998, Sillitoe, 1999, Schneider, 2012.
[453] Toren, 2010, Jolly, 1992.
[454] Strong, 2007.

subjectivity than relations bound in land law, which can further elucidate critiques of local and national-scale politics.

My second theoretical contribution follows from the first, as dichotomous understandings of economic identity - a frequently racialised topic in Fiji - can no longer hold within a contemporary context of the iTaukei entrepreneur. I have sketched continuities of exchange to interrogate confounding economic definitions of iTaukei farmers. Involvement within contemporary market exchange means that individuals are frequently balancing economic strata and their attendant obligations and expectations. Within this system, I have drawn on the economic role of the middleman as a figure who elides the past (as foreign merchant) and present (as entrepreneurial neighbour), suggesting a form of continuity, but all the while he attempts to keep the past *in the past*, because of its connotations of iTaukei economic marginalisation. In turn, this ethnography has contributed a grounded example of the ways postcolonial economic identities are shifting in step with the market's encroachment into every aspect of village life. The implication is that entrenched tropes are increasingly subverted, and this invites conflicted socio-cultural reflexivity. To what extent racialised discourses are replaced with class-based thinking is yet unknown, but this study suggests that as racial groups no longer easily bifurcate in historically coded – and spatially segmented - binaries of market/tradition, economic definitions will evolve that better reflect the scene, as in the vernacular focus on exporters as the primary site of market opacity, hope, and suspicion. In doing a historiography of the middleman in Fiji, I have – following Plange (1990) and Rokolekutu (2007) – highlighted some of the tensions in turning from 'ethnic politics' towards 'class politics', in which enduring questions of citizenry, indigenous paramountcy, inequality, and land rights come to the fore once again. Further research is called for which brings together ethnographic data and political science in ways that capture evolving economic identities across racial groups in Fiji, whilst acknowledging the historical antecedents to present-day socio-economic arrangements.

My third theoretical contribution, as described ethnographically above, advances the idea that the temporal logic of *continuity* challenges the Western temporality of climate change as *rupture*. I have shown the ways climate change is localised in Taveuni within fatalistic literalist Biblical time which organises life from the perspective of a prescribed future. This predictable future balances the unpredictability of the present, making congruous the sense of *untimeliness* that pervades as weathers and seasons increasingly confound. In view of apocalyptic prophecy, all socio-environmental phenomena become auguries for the end, which make for a highly moralised present. Notably, for both theoretical and practical applications, this inversion of expected *disempowerment* suggests that where literalist Biblical eschatology is often aligned with fatalism, the incorporation of *climate time*

into the locality makes climate *more* morally resonant as a result of, not in spite of, its contiguity with existing temporalities.

Future research should consider that - whilst the ways in which climate change categories are locally moralised is often hard to predict - attention to existing temporalities offers some ways to understand its discursive integration. Further research into the varied possible temporal alignments between climate eschatology and local temporal frameworks can foreground the ways in which conceptions of *time* and *agentic capacity* are entwined within climate discourse. Whilst this research has shown climate temporality quite easily integrates into the local time-scene - of Biblical, prophetic, declining qualities - it remains to be seen how its confirmatory doom-and-gloom maintains a socio-moral landscape which challenges narratives of disempowerment. In the future, it may well be necessary - because of discursive saturation and of the scalar disjunctions between unpredictable *weather* and objectified *climate* - to approach 'climate change' as part of projects of individuals' meaning-making that increasingly obfuscate its underlying socio-technological configurations. However, the moral perspectivism of climate change, as this thesis has shown, complicates globalised logics of victimisation. In turn, as forms of reflexive ethnography take more seriously the baggage one takes with them, anthropologies of climate change must remember its fundamental object of study is, in and of itself, a contested, non-indigenous, and – dangerously – weighty discursive instrument that rearranges time to *its* ends. Conversely, the regular visits by NGOs, government agencies, and, indeed, of Global North researchers such as myself, frequently confirms to islanders that there is much importance and socio-ecological relevance to 'going back' in this prophesised – yet unpredictable - time.

Concluding remarks

This ethnography is *in and of* the past, the conclusion the beginning to your forgetting. I returned to Taveuni in April 2025 in an attempt to keep the dynamic contradictions alive: of writing-as-farce and 'the field' as ever-changing, slipping into unknowability, absence, referent, and beckoning returns. The fundamental problem with the 'black and white' is not that it may hold some truth, but rather that its impermanence and inability to adapt to the present moment, for the future, means it fails to reflect the epistemological processes of those I have tried to speak *about*. In turn, I hope the forgetting is quick and painless; that only that which speaks truth is passed on and, therein, corroborated. The stories that people tell and the perspectives they hold, as Inoke noted, are plentiful. I have tried to pass on a few which point to the future, to the past, and to the gap between.

Appendices

Appendix 1

isevusevu

Kemudou, na turaga

Kerekere, meu se cakacaka nada yani

Vakaturaga saki i [na icavuti vakavanua]

Vakaturaga saka i na vei matabure dabe sake tiko ena [mataka nikua / yakavi nikua / bogi nikiua]

Dua saka na waka ni yaqona lailai au mai cabora tiko e matamudou noqu goneturaga.

Na yaqona na isevusevu vakaturaga. Sa kerei saka tiko kina nomudou veiciqomi. Na yaqona sa cabe vakaturaga tiko mai Paratania.

Na yaqona sa kerei saka tiko kina nomudou vei vakadonui ena vakadidike, au na mai qarava tiko ena nomudou vanua.

Sa kerei tale tiko ga nomudou vei vosoti ke sakasaka se baleca noqu ivakarau ena noqu mai vakadidike voli.

Sa balabalavu saka na vosa ni yaqona.

Sa vakacaberi tale tiko i [na icavuti vakavanua]

Sosoraki atu

Appendix 2

Environmental survey

Vosa Vakaviti / English **Kedra I tukutuku** / Please complete the survey

1. **Tikotiko**
   Location: _____

2. **Yabaki**
   Age: _____

3. [**Tagane**] [**Yalewa**] (Toqa)
   [Male] [Female] (Please circle as appropriate)

4. **[iTaukei] [Indo-Fijian] [Part-European / Kailoma] [Chinese] [Other:_____]**

5. **[Matalotu: Katolika / Wesele / LDS / 7th Day Adventist / Other: _____]**
   [Hindu] [Muslim] [Dua tale : _____]

   [Christian: Catholic / Methodist / LDS / 7th-Day Adventist / Other: _____]
   [Hindu] [Muslim] [Other: _____]

6. **Lewe vica na lewe ni vuvale: Qase: _____ Gone: _____**

   How many in the household: _____adults_____kids_____grandparents

7. **Koro: _____ Yavusa: _____ Mataqali: _____**
   Tutu Vakavanua: _____

   Where are you from? _____
   If you are from a village, please write Village: _____ Yavusa: _____
   Mataqali: _____ Traditional role: _____

   Sa yabaki vica beka na nomuni tiko e Taveuni kevaka ni cavutu mai ena dua na delanyiavu koya tiko ena taudaku kei Taveuni?

   If you are from outside Taveuni, how long have you been staying in Taveuni:

   _____
   _____

8. **A cava beka na vurevure ni nomuni lavo? _____**
   What is your main source of income: **_____**

   . **Dua tale tiko na ivurevure nomuni rawa ka vakailavo?**
   Do you have any other supplemental forms of income at present?
   _____

   . **E vica beka na uma ni nomuni lavo ko ni dau vakayagatak ena kakana?**
   What is your monthly spend on food?

$_____

I Teitei / Your farm:

9. **Na mataqali qele vakacava ko ni teitei tiko kina? Wirina: [Native] [Lease] [Freehold]**
   What is your farm's land type? Please circle: [Native] [Leasehold] [Freehold]
   Kevaka ko ni vakayagataka kece tiko na mataqali qele sa volai koto e cake kerekere mo ni qai vakamacala ga mai kina.

   If you have farms on a mixture of land types, please state the details here*:*

   _____
   _____
   _____

   Kevaka ko ni vakayagataka tiko na Native Land, Ko ni taukena vakacava na qele?

   If you are on Native land: How did you acquire the land?

   _____
   _____
   _____

   Kevaka ni vakayagataka tiko na qele lisi, Na gauna cava e tekivi kina na nomuni qele lisi? E vica beka na yabaki na nomuni lisi ka vica tiko beka na nomuni sausaumi?

   If you are on Leasehold land: Since when have you leased the land? With who, how long is the lease, and what are your lease repayments?

   _____
   _____
   _____

   Kevaka ko ni taukena tiko na Freehold land: Na gauna cava o ni sa taukena kina na qele? Ke se bera ni saumi vakadua, na gaunisala cava ko ni qarava tiko kina na kena sausaumi?

   If you are on Freehold land: Since when have you owned the land? If not bought outright, what are the conditions of your payment?

   _____
   _____
   _____

10. **E tiko beka e so na nomuni tei ko ni vakacici bisinisi tiko kina?**
    Do you sell any crops for commercial purposes? If so, list them.

_____
_____

. **E vica beka na kilo na dalo ko ni dau volitaka tiko ena veivula? _____kg**
  How much dalo (kgs) do you sell each month, typically? _____kg

11. **Na cava sara mada na nomuni rai me baleta na ulutaga oqo:**
    To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

    "Na teitei sa dua na i vurevure ni nodra i yau na luveda me ra na rawata kina na tiko vinaka ena veisiga ni mataka"
    "Future generations should get into farming as it is a good way to make a living"

[Sega ni vakadoodonu kina] [Vakadodonu kina]
[Strongly disagree] [Disagree] [Neither agree nor disagree] [Agree] [Strongly Agree]

. **Na cava na vuna ko ni _____ ena I tukutuku e toqai toka mai cake?**
Why do you [_____] with this statement?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

12. **E sa bau dua na gauna e dikevi (test) kina na nomuni qele? [Io] [Sega]**
Have you ever had your soil tested? Please circle: [Yes] [No]

Kevaka e sa dikevi oti na cava e qai laurai kina?
If yes, what were the results?

_____
_____

13. **Ko ni sa bau vakayagataka oti eso na wainimate me vakabulabulataka na nomuni qele ni teitei? [Io] [Sega]**
Have you ever used any chemical treatments on your land? Please circle: [Yes] [No]

Kevaka e [Io], na wainimate cava ko dau vakayagataka, vakamacalataka walega e dau vakayagataki vakacava se gauna cava e dau vakayagataki kina.?
If yes, which kinds of chemicals do you use? How often do you apply these chemicals?

_____
_____

_____

_____

<u>Tikotiko /</u> <u>Environment</u>**<u>:</u>**

14. **Na draki eda sotava tiko qo e tautauvata se sa duidui mai na veiyabaki sa oti?**
Wirina: [Tautauvata] [Duidui] [Sega ni tara rawa]
Has this year's weather been similar or different to previous years?
Please circle: [Similar] [Different] [I don't know]

Kevaka e duidui , na cava na nomuni rai me baleta na duidui ni draki eda sotava tiko?
If different: what has been different? In your opinion, what are the reasons for this difference?

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____

_____

15. **Veidutaitaki ratou mada na draki veiveisau eda sotava tiko ena gauna oqo ka tuvani ratou mai na kena e vakacacana sara tikoga vakalevu na noda I teitei ki vei koya e lailai sara na veika e vakayacora ena I teitei.**
    From the environmental issues below, please rank in order of those that are of most concern/threat to your farm? Ranking top 3 of most concern.

    - ***Veicurumaki ni waitui keina Waidradu*** *Salt-water intrusion*
    - ***Cagilaba*** *Cyclones*
    - ***Dravuisiga*** *Droughts*
    - ***Ualuvu*** *Flooding*
    - ***Bulabula ni qele*** *Soil health/fertility*
    - ***Draki veiveisau*** *Unseasonal weather*
    - ***Sisi ni qele*** *Soil erosion*
    - ***Manumanu era kania na vua ni qele (pests)*** *Crop diseases*
    - ***Tauvimate ni lewe ni tei / Yali ni manumanu keina kau***
      Loss of different plants/animals

      Qai biuta tale eso ko nanuma ni vakaleqa tiko na bula ni teitei.
      Other [please specify if there are other environmental issues you are concerned about and rank these beside the above]
      _____

16. **Mai na veika e toqai toka mai cake, gaunisala cava ko ni dau vakayagataka mo ni walia kina naleqa oqo ena nomuni teitei?**
    For the 3 ranked of most concern, how do you adapt to these issues on your farm?

17. **E tiko e dua na nomuni inisua? [Io] [Sega]**
    Do you have any form of insurance?
    [Yes] [No]

Draki veiveisau / Climate change:

18. **Na gauna cava se vanua cava ko ni sa bau rogoca kina na ulutaga oqo "Climate Change"**?
When and from where did you first hear about the topic of climate change?

_____
_____

_____

a) E vakacava sara tu mada na nomuni kauwai me baleta na Climate Change keina veika ena rawa ni cakava ena nomuni teitei me vaka nio koya sara ga oqo na vurevure ni nomuni yau.
How concerned are you that climate change will affect your ability to make a living from farming? Please circle:

[Sega ni kauwai] [Kauwai] [Kauwai vakalevu]
[Not concerned at all] [Not concerned] [Neutral] [Concerned] [Very concerned]

Kerekere ni vakamacalataka na nomuni sau ni taro
Please explain your response:

_____
_____
_____
_____

b) Na cava eda vulica mai ena I Volatabu me baleta na draki veiveisau (Climate Change)?
What can we learn from the Bible about climate change? (or if Hindu: the Vedas / if Muslim: the Quran)?

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____
_____

_____
_____

_____

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