

Where are the Cowrie Shells Hidden? Repositories of an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System

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Abstract

As a subject matter for research, indigenous Pacific Islands ethical systems are at present uncharted. Consequently, as a first piece, this Solomon Islands descriptive study explored the repositories of an indigenous Mala'ita ethical system, based on a multi-year field research among the Gula'ala people of East Mala'ita. The findings show that in an indigenous Mala'ita ethical system, its repositories are in the daily practices, activities and ways of life of the people. As repositories, these are entirely outside of and inaccessible to the university ethical systems which govern contemporary Pacific research.

Keywords: *indigenous Pacific Islands ethical systems; Solomon Islands; East Mala'ita*

*I have been out on the reef
looking for cowrie shells
but every rock has been turned
by those who went before me*

*I am tired and disappointed
but I shall keep on trying
in case I find one
looking for a place to hide.*

Reef Walking (a poem by Konai H. Thaman)

Introduction

The discontentment with conventional research seems widespread. Among indigenous scholars, the bases for this frustration are varied and include a non-alignment of research to indigenous peoples' aspirations (Abdullah & Stringer, 1999), differences of philosophical paradigms (Hart, 2010), inadequate and mis-representation of indigenous peoples in research (Bishop, 1998; Smith, 1999), biased privileging of scientific discourse in research (Deloria, 1980; Smith, 1999), encroachment into indigenous peoples' intellectual spaces (Maddocks, 1991), and misappropriation of indigenous peoples' intellectual properties (Henderson, 2000).

Within this general disquiet, scholars have raised numerous ethical concerns. These have included concerns over the differences of interpretation of ethics (Wax, 1991), claims of systematic neglect by research ethics committees to collective rights and community consent (Glass & Kaufert, 2007) and privileging of a Western-biased ethical system that assumes individual rights as paramount (Brew, 2001). Additionally, apprehensions have been due to applications of inappropriate ethical codes when researching indigenous knowledge (Castellano, 2004), and the exclusion of indigenous ethical processes (Worby & Rigney, 2002). Furthermore, concerns have included issues of cultural validity of ethical decisions by university and professional research organizations (Mead, 2003) and claims of imposition of such ethical principles as autonomy, beneficence and non-maleficence (Hudson, 2005).

In relation to Pacific research, the dissatisfaction by indigenous Pacific scholars with conventional research generally mirrors those expressed above (see Gegeo, 1998; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006). Consequently, in relation to research ethics, advocates of indigenous Pacific research have been calling for all research with, of or on indigenous peoples to reflect Pacific peoples' value systems, including their principles (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samui, Finau, 2001; Sanga and Pasikale, 2002), moral frameworks (Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Johansson-Fua, 2009; Sanga, 2011), and indigenous Pacific peoples' ethical systems (Sanga, 2014).

Empirical research on indigenous Pacific knowledge systems, however, is relatively youthful. In a recent observation, Sanga (2012) noted that there is still little systematic information available or written about Pacific education research capacity. Having said this, it is acknowledged that there is a healthy volume of writing in the grey literature on indigenous Pacific knowledge systems, particularly from an advocacy perspective (see Sanga and Kidman, 2012; Sanga and Thaman, 2009). However, even in the grey literature, there has been little written about indigenous Pacific ethical systems or theorizing on these systems. As a first piece on indigenous Mala'ita (Solomon Islands) ethical system (Sanga, 2014), I had described a morality system which is integrated, tribe-based, with overlapping relationships between personal and communal morality; a system which privileges obedience and one which is held together through *abu* or holy living. The purpose of that paper was to show that indigenous Pacific peoples do have systems of ethics which are alive and can be clearly described and explained.

At this point, numerous questions can be asked: For instance in oral Pacific cultures, what does an indigenous ethical system look like? How is an indigenous Pacific ethical system structured? What principles does such a system highlight? To understand an indigenous ethical system, where does one look? What does one look for? These and many more questions can be asked. In this article, I focus on the question: What are the repositories of an indigenous Pacific ethical system? In exploring this question I show that in an indigenous Pacific ethical system, the repositories of ethics are not found in institutional policies, professional codes of ethics or state laws. Instead, the repositories are the daily practices, activities and ways of life which are part and parcel of the peoples' moral philosophies. In answer to my focus question, I describe these repositories, together with the principles which are privileged and the social settings of these principles within the knowledge system. It is hoped that researchers, including indigenous

scholars might appreciate the wisdom and contributions of indigenous peoples' intellectual traditions from the modest insights of this paper on a Mala'ita indigenous ethical system.

The Context

The setting for this paper is in Melanesian Solomon Islands, an archipelago of about 1,000 islands east of Papua New Guinea and north-west of Vanuatu. In relation to Micronesia, the Solomon Islands lies south of Nauru and south-east of The Federated States of Micronesia. Politically, the Solomon Islands is an independent state, having obtained its constitutional independence from Britain in 1978. Today, the country is a constitutional monarchy, with the Queen of United Kingdom as the Head of State but represented by a Solomon Islands Governor General and an elected Prime Minister as Head of Government. In terms of geography, Solomon Islands has a land area of 28,400 square kilometres or 11,000 square miles (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Islands). Culturally, eighty or more indigenous languages are found in the Solomon Islands with many islanders speaking a number of languages, together with *pijin* English; the every-day language of communication in urban areas. The official language is English. The majority of people live in villages.

The island of Mala'ita has an approximate area of 4,000 square kilometres. The island is one of six main islands in the Solomon Islands archipelago; the others being Choiseul, Isabel, New Georgia, Guadalcanal and Makira. Like the other main islands, Mala'ita is mountainous with a dense tropical forest and numerous rivers and streams. The Mala'ita islanders are Melanesians, with cultures which are patrilineal. There are eleven linguistic groups on the island. From north to south, these language groups are Toabaita, Baelelea, Beagu, Lau, Fataleka, Kwara'ae, Langalanga, Gula'alā, Kwaio, Dorio, Are'Are and Sā. Mala'ita islanders have village settlements along the coastlines, in river valleys as well as on mountain ridges. Distinct in Mala'ita are the man-made islands in the Langalanga lagoon (near the township of Auki) and Lau lagoon in north-east Mala'ita. While many Mala'ita people live in other parts of the Solomon Islands, those who live on the island number around 140,000 people; making Mala'ita the most populated island in the archipelago. Like other Solomon Islanders, Mala'ita people live on their ancestral tribal lands; practising age-old customs of subsistence and communal living, often not under the direct control of the modern Solomon Islands state. The worldview of indigenous Malaita islanders are theocratic; hence their integrated ethical system.

On the eastern coast of Mala'ita island live the Gula'alā people; speaking the Gula'alā language. Like other Melanesians on Mala'ita Island, the Gula'alā people are indigenous to their context and make up the smallest (about 1,800 people) of the twelve linguistic groups on the island. The Gula'alā people are coastal dwellers and share boundaries and overlapping relationships with the Kwaio, Kwara'ae, Fataleka and Lau linguistic groups. The Gula'alā people are made up of seven tribes. In pre-Christian Malaita, these tribes were hostile to each other whereas today, the Gula'alā are living peacefully with each other and with the neighbouring linguistic groups. This peaceful co-existence is a direct result of Christianity which was introduced to the Gula'alā in the early 1900s. Like other Mala'ita islanders, the Gula'alā live on their ancestral tribal lands, going about their daily lives according to age-old customs and their acquired Christian value system. Neither Christianity nor modernization have completely influenced the ethical

system of the Gula'alā. Apart from Gula'alā people who may be living in Honiara (capital of Solomon Islands), those who live in Gula'alā still speak their indigenous language daily.



[Map of 'Malaita Island']

Literature review

In conventional research, the repositories of the ethical system used are embedded in the policies and associated institutionalized systems of universities, professional associations, state laws and international conventions. In the following paragraphs, examples are described, together with what is deposited in these repositories of ethics. At the end of each paragraph, a brief critical comment is made, from an indigenous research perspective.

First, in modern universities, it is common to find ethics policies, regulations and specific committees which are approved by the governing bodies of these universities. For instance, matters of ethics in research for the University of Hawai'i are governed by the Ethics policies and regulations and monitored by the university ethics committee (<http://www.hawaii.edu/svpa/ep/e5/e5214.pdf>). In this instance, the objective of this policy is to promote and protect the integrity of the University of Hawai'i (1998) and to promote adherence

to appropriate state and federal laws. Further, the University of Hawai'i policy also stipulates that the authorities for and terms of discipline and appeal rest with the university.

Similarly, at the University of Auckland (2013), research ethics are guided by a policy statement which outlines the guiding principles, the application and approval processes and implementation protocols (<https://www.policies.auckland.ac.nz/policy-display-register/code-of-conduct-research.pdf>). This policy is monitored and implemented by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. The scope of this policy is extensive and covers all researchers including employees, honorary appointees, emeritus appointees, students, staff and other institutional members of the University of Auckland.

At the Victoria University of Wellington (2014), matters of ethics in research are covered by a Council approved policy which defines what is ethical and what is not (<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/documents/policy/research-policy/appendix-a-human-ethics-committee-guidelines.pdf>). As well, this policy privileges the key ethical principles of respect, consent and conflict of interest. More so, a particular process is used in applying for, determining and obtaining ethics approval. Similar to the other two universities, the Victoria University of Wellington ethics policy is monitored and implemented by the university ethics committee.

As repositories of an ethical system, the university mandated policies, regulations and processes of ethics are similar, suggesting a certain degree of homogeneity and universality of application. Consequently Castellano (2004) has observed that such systems of ethics are inappropriate for conducting of research in aboriginal and indigenous communities. It is in direct response to such inadequacies that groups such as the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (2003) have devised a code of conduct for research in Northern communities, especially to support such communities to be involved in all stages of research.

Second, there are professional associations within nation states which govern matters of research ethics. For instance in Australia, besides the requirements of individual universities, certain research in education must conform to the code of ethics of the Australian Association for Research in Education (1995), particularly in compliance to its principles relating to harm, consent, deception, secrecy and confidentiality. In the New Zealand context, certain university research activities are governed by professional ethics committees such as the Health and Disabilities Ethics Committee or the New Zealand Association for Research in Education.

From an indigenous research perspective, such repositories of professional ethics are inadequate, hence the establishment in Canada of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2000) set of ethical guidelines for indigenous communities. Likewise, in the same year, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (2000) approved its Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies; offering advice for researchers and communities in matters of consultation, negotiation, participation, benefits and outcomes of research. While the Canadian and Australian initiatives are positive, these are predominantly institutional programmes and are well outside of the authority of indigenous communities.

Third, there are state or national laws which govern matters of research ethics. In Canada, human subject research is governed under the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS); a Federal government policy for the three agencies, Canadian Institute of Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council (Government of Canada, 2010). At a national level, in Solomon Islands, non-Solomon Islands researchers are required under the Education Act (Solomon Islands Government, 1978) to obtain ethical clearance from the Ministry of Education. In New Zealand, certain health-related research are considered and monitored by the Health and Disabilities Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health and or the Health Research Council (2010).

Again, from an indigenous research perspective, such state laws are deemed inadequate on their own. For instance in Canada, the Assembly of Alaska Native Educators (2000) had devised a set of guidelines regulating research in their communities while allowing for indigenous knowledge practices to be incorporated. Similarly, in New Zealand, in addition to state laws and professional and institutional ethics policies, Government departments have also mandated other ethical guidelines as the Ministry of Social Development (2004) Guidelines for Research and Evaluation with Māori and the Ministry of Education's Pasifika Education Research Guidelines (Anae, M., Coxon, E., Mara, D., Wendt-Samu, T., & Finau, C., 2001) for use by sector researchers when researching Māori and Pacific peoples in New Zealand. In recognizing the value of these mediated additions to advance the priorities of indigenous peoples, it is noted that these initiatives have remained within the authority and jurisdiction of the institutional bodies that created them, rather than belonging to the local indigenous peoples' communities.

Fourth, there are international conventions that house systems of ethics governing research. Many of these include various organs of the United Nations (2014) (see <http://www.un.org/en/>). In 1946 for instance, the World Health Organization constitution stipulated the enjoyment of the highest standards of health as a fundamental right of every human being; a stipulation which has had considerable effect on global health research. Other conventions include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) and the Convention on the Rights of Children (1989) with, among other things, its article protecting the rights of children. More recently (2005), there has been the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights which stipulates a list of ethical principles including human rights, fundamental freedoms and individual autonomy. In response to this latest convention, a Pacific audience (Regional Pacific Ethics of Knowledge Production Workshop in Apia, 2007) refuted the homogenous assumptions underpinning the United Nations declaration and their assumed privileging of the individual person outside of communal responsibilities (Mila-Schaaf, 2008).

Methodology

As an approach for this paper, I use the poem *Reef Walking* by Professor Konai Thaman in a metaphorical sense; searching for *cowrie shells* as those valuable aspects of an indigenous ethical system. It is in my *reef walking* that I upturn a *reef rock* or a metaphoric repository of an indigenous ethical system, describing each repository and its features.

This paper is based on content which had been obtained from my wider fifteen-year research project on the Gula'alā people of East Mala'ita, Solomon Islands. Briefly, the wider project is a multi-disciplinary study of Gula'alā society. In writing this paper, I have drawn from aspects of my wider project that had dealt with moral philosophy and ethics. In addition to the scholarly investigations that I had undertaken over the years, I have used data from my recordings of daily activities, interviews with numerous Gula'alā elders and *ala lā kini* (intentional focussed discussions) with key Gula'alā knowledge experts. As well, I am an indigenous Gula'alā and a clan leader of my people.

The scope of this paper however is limited to the Gula'alā; thereby limiting its application. However, the paper is relevant to indigenous Pacific peoples generally and is inspirational to a new generation of Mala'ita, Melanesian and indigenous Pacific researchers. In writing this piece, I do so as a communal responsibility to this new area of scholarship. At the same time I acknowledge my personal responsibility for any limitations of description, interpretation or execution of scholarship.

Findings

In the following sections, I describe the repositories of an indigenous Gula'alā ethical system, using Professor Konai Thaman's metaphorical reef-walking. Because this work is of a new area of scholarship, the study findings are delimited to basic descriptions, rather than to more analytical treatments.

Reef rock 1: Fānanaua

In our reef walking, we upturn rock 1 and thereunder we find *cowrie shells* of Mala'ita ethical system called *fānanaua* (noun for moral teachings). *Fānanau lā* refers to acts or practices of daily moral teachings, intended to shape the character of Mala'ita clan members. Using oral communication, parents, grandparents, adults and older clan members will deliberately *shape* younger ones about principles, behaviours, norms and aspects of their tribal *tagi* (ethical system). Mothers and grandmothers will, on a daily basis, morally shape their daughters and granddaughters about key societal principles such as obedience, respect, honour, trustworthiness and responsibility. In shaping a child about obedience, a Mala'ita mother might say:

*Wela nau ae,
'Oe wela 'oko kwaia tala,
Wela loko 'agera ka laungi 'oe,
'Oe wela 'o rō loko.*

Translated, this reads:

*My dear child,
You who will one day be a trail-blazer,
A child whom others will decorate in honor,*

Such a child is an obedient one.

Fānanau lā takes place when adults and their children are undertaking chores, walking to the food gardens, traveling in canoes or sitting together specifically to administer *fānanaua*. Such activities take time and often children are attentive and receptive to being socialized within these settings. In this form of moral shaping, children actively participate by asking questions, seeking clarifications and even debating with their adult teachers.

As a knowledge domain, *fānanaua la* is a private domain activity hence is not done in public where non-relative tribal members or strangers might hear or witness valuable secrets being conveyed. As a private domain activity, this is a duty for which parents are primarily responsible.

In this indigenous ethical system, *fānanaua* is the centre-piece of indigenous Mala'ita ethical system. *Fānanaua* can be described as the sun around which stars revolve. On one hand, *fānanaua* informs and is the basis for all other repositories of ethics and on the other; all other repositories reflect the radiance or dullness of *fānanaua*. Because of this symbiotic relationship, without *fānanaua*, indigenous Mala'ita ethical system is neglected, becomes unclear or is easily lost. *Fānanau lā* usually appeals to both principles and consequences.

Reef rock 2: Fābasua

As we reef-walk along, we upturn another rock, under which we find *cowrie shells* of Mala'ita ethical system called *fābasua*. *Fābasua* refers to the invocations and pronouncements from priests, elders and parents on members of a clan or family. Sometimes these are disciplinary and are usually based on or referenced to *fānanau lā* (actions of moral teachings). At other times, *fābasua* are corrective or evaluative responses, intended to reinforce or reshape moral character. The action of *fābasu lā* involves an adult clan member, pronouncing or invoking a stern warning or teaching in a one-sided manner and is intended to correctively reshape character. When *fābasu lā* is taking place, recipients of this form of moral shaping are generally expected to "take it all in" in silence. This is not the time for questions or questioning.

The following *fābasua* captures a father's words as he administered a disciplinary teaching to a wayward son, as follows:

Wenē wela
Ku 'arefo 'agu nori
'Oe wela gournouri 'utā nē
'Oe lilisangea 'asia nō
Kosi rongo, kosi 'abero
Finigalo gera ka gefusi 'oe laona kilu.

Translated, this reads:

Oh young man
It sure surprises me
What of you, a child of heritage?
You disobedient one
Who does not hear, nor cares
Might one day be pushed over into a hidden pit.

In this instance, the *fābasua* though intended for a son, is done publicly. The father is reinforcing a teaching on obedience. The father expresses surprise that a son who has an ethical heritage should neglect such a heritage. The father calls his son a disobedient one. He adds a threat about how disobedience often results in dishonor, being “pushed over into a hidden pit.” It is noted that to understand the meaning and the pedagogical style of this moral teaching requires an understanding of the cultural setting. Where the child is unclear or unsure of the *fābasua*, often another adult who is present will follow through on the moral reshaping task with a *fānanaua* session.

Fābasu lā (action or practice of *fābasua*) is also administered for the entire family, clan or community. When this happens, the knowledge which is communicated is a public domain entity. When a *fābasu lā* activity is communal, this is often intended to reinforce certain priority communal moral values and or teachings. Unlike *fānanau lā* which is done in private, *fābasu lā* takes places in a public setting within hearing of family and non-family tribal members. In a sense, a public social setting is deemed as the appropriate social context for *fābasu lā*. When *fābasu lā* is done as a private domain activity, this is administered by family members, rather than by non-relatives. As a public domain activity, any elder including non-family members within a clan can administer *fābasu lā* for younger tribe members but only in public. In contemporary Mala'ita villages, *fābasu lā* commonly takes place within Christian churches and community meetings.

Reef rock 3: Kwaikwaia

In our ongoing reef-walking, when rock 3 is upturned, we find *cowrie shells* called *kwaikwaia*. These are the judgements, punishments, consequential and restorative actions by clan priests, elders, parents and adult members on those who have broken Mala'ita *tagi* (ethical system). From a moral perspective, there are three primary forms of *kwaikwaia*: (1), *Toto lā* (compensations), (2) *Fā didi lā* (restoration of peace, justice or compassion) and (3), *Fā abu lā* (sanctification).

In theocratic Mala'ita, *toto lā* or compensations are regularly demanded and offered between individual and groups. Moral crimes would range from swearing to disrespectful laughing of women or the elderly; from sexual misdemeanours to women farting in the hearing of men; and from boys and men staring at girls or women to a wife walking alone with another male adult.

Fā didi lā is a particular form of *toto lā* (compensation) and it is intended to speedily restore peace. Particularly when serious moral crimes are committed such as sexual

transgressions, or fights resulting in blood being spilt, or a boy has eloped with a girl, then the wronged party will demand an immediate compensation. The family of the wrongdoer is expected by *falafala* (indigenous *kastom* or convention) to immediately pay up a certain amount of compensation, using *tāfuli'ae* (a Mala'ita shell currency). *Fā didi lā* is intended to pacify the wronged party in order to allow for a more negotiated and fitting settlement to be reached, using accepted tribal *kastom* means and hopefully, justice.

In theocratic Mala'ita, moral wrongs must be righted to ensure *abu lā* (holiness). *Abu lā* is obtained through ceremonial activities called *Fā abu lā* (sanctification). Because theocratic Mala'ita is an integrated belief system, both parties (wrong-doer and wronged) are expected to undertake *fā abu lā* to each other and separately, to their spirit ancestors. Where humans defile the sacredness of other creatures (such as land, residence, space, food, utensils, domesticated animals), they too must restore holiness through *fā abu lā*, usually in the form of an offering to the spirit ancestors.

These *kwaikwaia* practices in Mala'ita society are essential parts of the indigenous ethical system of Mala'ita. Their daily maintenance contributes to their sustainability as repositories of the indigenous Mala'ita ethical system. Due to the influences of Christianity and modernization, *kwaikwaia* is one of the most eroded aspects of indigenous Mala'ita ethical system.

Reef rock 4: Tarafulā

When rock 4 is upturned, we find *cowrie shells* called *tarafulā* (proverbs). In Mala'ita, *tarafulā* are proverbial wise sayings which appeal to both principles and consequences. Among the Gula'alā people of East Mala'ita, the following *tarafulā* might be heard on any day of the week:

Alua tafu nā ka tō 'ana māsia na afe loko 'i Lau'alo. Translated this says, *Leave the heap of rubbish for the Lau'alo currents to take away.*

As a Gula'alā *tarafulā* (proverb), this wise teaching reinforces the importance of working on a task to completion. Two explanatory observations are made about this *tarafulā*. First, in a pedagogical sense, while this proverb intends to teach the virtues of industry, diligence and completion of tasks, the proverbial statement itself appears to say the opposite (i.e. *leave the heap of rubbish*). In this example, the use of negative logic and or negative association (heap of rubbish on land and sea currents) are common in Gula'alā *tarafulā*. Second, in order to understand the *tarafulā* fully, an understanding of considerable contextual knowledge is essential, such as of the Lau'alo currents of North Mala'ita and the daily village cleaning schedules in Gula'alā.

In another *tarafulā*, one might say:

?Ilifainia ra Laua 'oto nā. Translated, this asks, *Could it be like Laua?*

Among the Gula'alā, this *tarafulā* is intended to teach trustworthiness, dependability and consistency of word and deed. To understand this *tarafulā*, one has to know the story of Laua; a famous warrior for his people in Mala'ita. Whenever Laua and his band of men would visit another

tribe, this leader would habitually urge his men to be morally upright among their guests; an advice he himself never followed at any time especially under cover of darkness. This leader finally met with fatal consequences as a result of his inconsistent behaviour and double lifestyle.

In Mala'ita, it is usually a mature clan member who would speak *tarafulā* into a situation as a moral injecting or reinforcement. Commonly, *tarafulā* is offered with either light-heartedness or sarcasm possibly as a pedagogical tool for communicating important but difficult moral messages.

Not all proverbial sayings are for moral shaping. Conversely, some of the proverbs might reflect the indigenous moral reasoning in Mala'ita ethical system. *Tarafulā* is a daily practice in tribal settings; and in Gula'alā villages today, older generations commonly use *tarafulā* in their daily communications.

Reef rock 5: Saefua

In upturning rock 5, we find that beneath this rock are hidden *cowrie shells* called, *saefua*. These are short narratives or stories often told with a definite "moral of the story" message. In Gula'alā the *saefua* genre commonly emphasizes *rō lā* (obedience) as this is a privileged principle in Mala'ita society. In Sanga (2014), I recorded two examples of Gula'alā *saefua*, as narrated to children by tribal elder, 'Afu Būga of Ngongosila village. In the *saefua*, 'A'aniwane, 'Afu Būga began his story as follows:

Tōtō tā, rō wela kini dāro tō 'adāro na. Rō wela nori rata dāro ra Suraokwaikwai fainia Suraoalibako. Dāro sikau mai dāro ka tō fainia tē dāro leleka dāro ka baita nō. Sui dāro ka angisia tē dāro fana dē lā. Mala tē dāro ka 'urī, 'aia.' Tē dāro ka dalofia nō na dadalo. Ka raungainia bala ilifainia maefinau. Sui ka kwatea nō fadāro. Tē dāro 'e kwatea fadāro 'unori sui ka fābasu dāro nō. "Amoro leleka 'amoro dē, leka 'amoro adasia kwage rama, moro oli nō mai 'i fanua. Fāsia 'A'aniwane ka 'ani 'amoro."

Translated, this narrative says:

Once there lived in these parts of the island, two boys. The names of these boys were Suraokwaikwai and Suraoalibako. Since their childhood, these boys had been living with their mother. Day after day, the boys would urge their mother to let them go fishing. One day, the mother agreed to their repeated requests; made them strings and hooks and passed these on to the boys. But before the boys set off to the sea, their mother sat them down and sternly warned the boys about a cannibal who was living by the sea. "When you go fishing and you see seaweeds floating in towards the shore, it is time to come home. Do not tarry otherwise the man-eater will eat you both.

In this *saefua*, the teaching is about obedience. On the evening of the recording of this particular *saefua*, the storyteller repeatedly emphasized obedience; in his voice tone, repetitions

of parts of the story and or in answer to children's questions about meaning or other enquiries. On this particular evening, three children between 5 and 12 were the audience. The older two had clearly heard this *saefua* before; yet all paid attention intently. All children, including the 5-year-old, asked questions and actively participated in the storytelling and its accompanying discussions. As a genre, *saefua* stories are usually told to children in the evenings and within family settings. Family evening gatherings, however, are disappearing due to modernization influences, such as fathers living away in urban centres from families in villages or children living in boarding schools away from families.

Reef rock 6: 'Ainimae

When rock 6 is upturned, we find *cowrie shells* called '*ainimae* which are historical accounts and narratives of significance for a family, clan and or tribe. Often these historical moments, happenings or incidents relate to lessons learnt from nature or errors committed by members. As a genre of knowledge repository, the '*ainimae* is expressed orally, in song, dance or as skits.

Consequently, when members of a Mala'ita tribe cease their dancing, singing or enacting of the lessons from '*ainimae*, this repository of indigenous Mala'ita ethics becomes neglected and is possibly 'killed.' As a genre, the guardians of this repository of ethics are clan elders who are often expected to narrate (if orally told or sung) or supervise (if enacted) '*ainimae* accounts. In Mala'ita, '*ainimae* narratives or enactments often take place in the evenings within family and clan gatherings.

In a private domain '*ainimae*, an elder might narrate to younger male members of his family, the historical events behind a current animosity between two neighbouring clans. This elder may choose to use the '*ainimae* to teach moral lessons as a deliberate socialization process to inculcate ideology or ethics. In such a setting, '*ainimae* is part of the private knowledge domain.

However, '*ainimae* is also communal and is performed or communicated in a public knowledge domain. For instance in Gula'alā villages, historical accounts of the introduction of Christianity to East Mala'ita or the participation of Gula'alā members in Christianization elsewhere in the Solomon Islands are performed annually in the month of July in village churches. In such communal '*ainimae*, adults retell stories of bravery, courage, sacrifice and service by Gula'alā men and women as a way of inculcating such principles and virtues to younger generation Gula'alā members.

Reef rock 7: Sili lā

When rock 7 is upturned, the *cowrie shells* to be found are called *sili lā*; a creative genre which includes laments and which often contains "sharp truths" (publicly undisputed truths). As a repository of indigenous Mala'ita ethics, *sili lā* is generally done by elders and only on rare occasions. In 2009, I recorded a *sili* by a matriarch tribal leader of Gula'alā; recounting the virtues of a Gula'alā husband, father and male leader. In English translation, some parts of this *sili* called *Alafaitalana*, are as follows:

*'Ōi, kelei rurūfia nau 'ae
 Ku manata oli to'ona
 Maedagi 'oro kini
 Dangi ka dangi boro
 Kakarai ka angi boro
 'E angi nō burimu
 'Oe leka nō matakwa daudau*

*My memories bring joy
 Of one whose days,
 The rooster was always late to announce
 Because you had gone to the deep ocean blue.*

*'Ōi, kelei rurūfia 'ae
 ?'E mamana 'asia
 Lua 'e lua 'urī tā
 'Oe dao mai fainia ta ia 'agu nori
 Ta leleko, ba'ā, 'alā ma ta gwaila kini
 Rau ni fā ele nau kini*

*Who among the living will dispute how you honored me, your bride?
 On days like today, as the tide is coming in; you'd be bringing home a canoe-full of the
 choicest of fish; the catch of joy for any bride or wife.*

*?Tei mouri nē ka manata buro amu
 Kusi manata buro amu
 Wane dangi ko fāfōlosia asi baita
 Wane 'o galia walo kini
 'Ōi kelei rurūfia lea nau 'ae.*

*How can the living forget you?
 Provider for a thousand,
 The one who crosses ocean currents
 and surveys submerged reefs.*

In the example above, both immediately after this *sili* was performed and since then, considerable discussions had taken place among clan members about the person who was honoured by the *sili*, the events referred to, and the subject matters contained within the *sili* and numerous other cultural significance of this *sili*. In each of these numerous discussions, considerable *fānanau lā* was done with younger clan members and numerous other 'ainimae were recounted.

Sili lā is orally performed as a lament or song, and is sometimes accompanied with dancing. When accompanied with dancing, this variety of *sili lā* is performed by a dance troupe. One such example is the *gilo* which is a form of *sili la* in Gula'alā. In *gilo*, a troupe of eight or ten male or female performers would sit or stand opposite each other and sing their *sili* while performing with bamboo sticks.

Generally, *sili lā* as an art form is dying out in Gula'alā and only a few can masterfully perform a *sili*. In summary, it is noted that the findings point to an indigenous Mala'ita ethical system which is integrated and embedding de-ontological, utilitarian, egoistic and natural law features within the various repositories.

Discussion

Reflective of the findings, the following discussion focuses on the nature of the repositories of this indigenous ethical system and explores its implications for research within indigenous knowledge communities.

First, the repositories of this indigenous Mala'ita ethical system are completely outside the realms of conventional university ethics. As this study has shown, the *cowrie shells* are hidden in the daily activities of *fānanaua*, *fābasua*, *saefua* and practices of *tarāfulā* and other ways of life of the Gula'alā such as *kwaikwaia* and *sili lā*. These repositories are indigenous and integral to the Gula'alā and located within the Gula'alā philosophical mind, worldviews, value systems, realities and ways of life. Consequently, the *cowrie shells* are not necessarily defined as in conventional ethical systems. The meanings of principles will differ and so is the privileging of principles. Because these repositories of ethics are located within Gula'alā, the knowledge systems therein are practically and intellectually inaccessible to the conventional university system. It is not until there are competent Gula'alā speakers within university systems before these repositories are opened to universities.

Second, in the indigenous Mala'ita ethical system, the repositories are part of an integrated moral philosophy. Unlike the compartmentalized and hierarchical system of ethics of the conventional university, the Gula'alā findings have shown a system which is interwoven around *fānanaua*, a back-bone repository. As stated, in Gula'alā, *fānanaua* is the principal repository for ethical exposition, evaluation and education. To use the metaphor of a distribution system, *fānanaua* is the warehouse where goods are moved in, sorted, labelled and moved out; where product, process and performance reports are received, debated and improvements are

made; and where the brains of the system interact, account, reconnect, engage, envision and sustain. Moreover, within this integrated system of ethics, principles and or virtues such as *abu lā* (holiness), *rō lā* (obedience) and *manatangado lā* (trustworthiness) are interconnected and infused throughout the network of repositories.

Third, the repositories of indigenous Mala'ita ethical system are under the moral and legal authority of families and clans. Elsewhere (Sanga, 2014) I had stated that indigenous Gula'alā ethical system is managed under knowledge management protocols, processes and criteria which belong to Gula'alā society. Consequently, it is Gula'alā clans and families who must deal with issues or questions on accountability, quality, maintenance and sustainability of the Gula'alā ethics repository system. While such autonomy seems clear-cut, this masks the complex conceptualizations and competing interests within and between repositories as families and clans negotiate and make decisions about knowledge, values and agenda.

Fourth, even without relevant empirical studies, it appears that the repositories of indigenous Mala'ita ethical system are under considerable pressure. First, on one hand Mala'ita clans are living within a global knowledge economy which is demanding the freeing-up of knowledge domains, greater collaboration with knowledge communities and engagement with governments, knowledge stakeholders and global scholars. On the other hand, Mala'ita clans are well aware of the risks of losing control of certain indigenous knowledge, including secret and sacred knowledge to outsiders. Second, on one hand an indigenous Mala'ita ethical system may be in conflict with other global ethical systems or levels. For instance, the Gula'alā *fānanaua* (which is the back-bone of Gula'alā ethical system) is a private knowledge domain repository. Only families hold the keys to *fānanaua* knowledge. In other words, this repository of ethical knowledge is not publicly accessible even within Gula'alā society. These questions may be asked: How can institutional (such as university) regulations, national and or international laws encroach upon indigenous private domain knowledge repositories and still be ethical? What limits may be justifiably imposed by outside jurisdictions on indigenous private knowledge domains? Why? When? By whom? How? As yet, these questions remain unanswered and beg the attention of indigenous and other Pacific researchers and scholars.

Conclusion

In the Pacific Islands region, scholarship on indigenous Pacific ethical systems is of a new area. To date, little empirical research had been done on the systems of ethics of the approximately 1,000 linguistic people groups in Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. In this first study on an indigenous Mala'ita ethical system, it is found that its repositories are clan-based; they are located philosophically within indigenous worldviews and are practically embedded within the ways of life of these islanders. As yet, these repositories of ethics are separate from and operate outside of the realms of the ethics systems of the conventional university. As aspects of an intellectual oral tradition, these repositories are as yet, unexplored and needing the care and attention of indigenous Pacific Islands scholars.

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