Revitalising Indigenous good governance in Solomon Islands

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As an integral part of the rising tide of political decolonisation and feminist counter-hegemonic movement in the 1960s, the 1970s and 1980s ushered in *epistemic decolonisation*. Although it may come under different terminologies and interpretations, the overarching theme or target of epistemic decolonisation is the decolonisation of the social construction and use of knowledge in the global South as well as among minority groups and women in the global North. In fact, it is duly acknowledged that some of the movement's most audacious and articulate front-liners are feminist academics and professionals of diverse ethnicities in the global North.[1]

While as a counter-hegemonic movement epistemic decolonisation can be described as achieving global recognition in the 1970s and 1980s, as a narrative or social discourse it has historically been symbiotic with political decolonisation. Both are often applied with equal audacity to sterilise metro-centric androcentrism from its historical dominance over the social construction of knowledge. In fact, political decolonisation is the physical performance or activation of epistemic decolonisation writ large.

Epistemic decolonisation is informed by a host of questions such as: Who should have the right to create knowledge and for whom? Is there knowledge which transcends all geophysical and socio-on-

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tological boundaries as to be rightfully called universal knowledge? Who has the expertise to construct such knowledge and where is it constructed? Whose epistemology, methodology, pedagogy, ontology, and hermeneutics inform the construction of such knowledge? As knowledge is generally equated with power, the underlying message of such questions is obviously the bigger question of who overall has the right or power to dictate over other groups in the social construction and use of knowledge.[2]

The long-felt need for epistemic decolonisation is made clear by the fact that, despite strong resistance, at times vitriolic attacks, by mainstream political, academic, and religious bodies, especially in the global North,[3] it has never lost momentum and instead, empowered by those vitriolic attacks, has unabatedly been gaining vitality and exactitude in voice and vision globally. This resilience can be gauged in numerous ways such as the burgeoning literature which includes alternative research paradigms anchored in epistemologies, methodologies, ontologies and hermeneutics of the global South,[4] the inclusion of minority group subjects in school curricula,[5] and a greater recognition of the contributions of women and minority groups to the well-being of the global community through education, research, advocacy for peace and racial harmony, healthcare, and other lines of work.

Other issues of concern in epistemic decolonisation involve the challenging question of how relevant or legitimate indigenous knowledge systems are in today's rapidly globalising world. The concern is particularly critical in formerly and still colonised societies where the impact of colonisation was, and is, of such a magnitude that indigenous knowledge systems are treated with contempt as unsalvageable relics of humanity's primordial past best left to rust to make space for the global proliferation of metro-centric ways of knowing, doing, and being. The meta-message of *epistemicide* or the killing of indigenous peoples' knowledge systems, in this case Pacific Island peoples' indigenous knowledge and languages, is clear.[6]

In sharp contrast, when advocates of epistemic decolonisation address the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge systems and lan-

guages, it is in the true spirit of community social activism, empowerment, and cultural re-vitalisation. It is stated with apprehension, however, that today menacing epistemicide is for the most part practised or committed by Pacific Island communities themselves as an indelible legacy of colonisation or unconscious devaluation of cultural knowledge. The menace is evidenced by *endophobia*, the syndrome of expressed dislike for one's own race or ethnicity in favour of *xenophilia*, the love of or desire for strangers and their cultural practices as evidenced by the adoption and practice *en masse* of Christianity and English or French in place of indigenous religions and languages by most Pacific Island communities, a process that began from the time of first European contact and continues today.

Epistemic and linguistic change is inevitable and experienced in every human society. However, for all practical purposes, menacing epistemicide and menacing linguicide in Solomon Islands should be closely monitored as so much has already been lost due to colonisation. There is no approach more strategically effective to doing so than Solomon Islands communities themselves re-embracing *endophilia*, the love for, respect for, and keeping of one's indigenous cultures and knowledge systems alive and functional through everyday active social practice.

Community re-embracing of endophilia must be the first fundamental step to controlling menacing epistemicide and menacing linguicide because no remedial policy or program, however scientifically sound, can succeed without it. And the reason is that the human agency required to drive it successfully to fruition is deeply engrained in endophilia itself. It should be noted though that, while deemed most effective, the re-embracing of endophilia by communities cannot be expected to take full effect overnight because it is a dynamic process of social and psychological re-building or transformation requiring major attitudinal change. The critical point to underscore is that, to be fully achieved, the re-embracing of endophilia must be set into motion with confidence and with trust fully invested in its inherent efficacy for desired positive change.

Scope and focus

Embracing the ethos of epistemic decolonisation, this paper argues for the reassertion of indigenous epistemology, ontology, and axiology in the interest of re-vitalising Kwara'ae indigenous governance and conflict resolution practices. Of particular attention is the issue that, as new cultural practices are introduced from abroad through globalisation, they get contextualised by taking on new cultural characteristics as they are acted upon by groups in Kwara'ae and Solomon Islands more generally. As the new cultural practices go through greater acculturation, they become doubly problematic relative to when they were first introduced.

The scenario is exemplified by 'rural-urban drift', in which young women and men leave their rural communities to find employment in town to earn cash to send back home to meet family obligations. However, once in town, free from the watchful eyes of culture and families, they do as they please, indulging, for example, in alcoholism, nightlife, and other behaviours typical of urban life. Ultimately, it is ineffective to address the new societal developments by metrocentric knowledge alone and indigenous knowledge must therefore be strategically incorporated into solution-seeking efforts.

Methodology

This essay was prompted by work on peace, reconciliation, and good governance which I have been involved in with various civil society organisations and government ministries in Solomon Islands. Data for the paper came from this work as well as an extensive review of the literature on Solomon Islands ethnic tensions which occurred from 1999 to 2003[7], and ongoing research on the role of indigenous epistemology, ontology, and hermeneutics in decolonisation, development, and the impact of globalisation on Solomon Islands and other Pacific Island societies. The paper employs a critical framework in examining issues, however it is not itself a criticism of what should or might have been done by the Solomon Islands government and communities to prevent the last

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national ethnic tensions and other societal crises such as urban riots from occurring.

In critically examining issues pertinent to the re-vitalisation of Kwara'ae indigenous governance and conflict resolution practices, I use specific examples from Kwara'ae and, where relevant, other Solomon Islands cultural groups. I now turn to a discussion of governance and conflict resolution practices in Kwara'ae, starting with a brief literature review of good governance more generally followed by good governance reviewed from a Kwara'ae perspective.

Governance and society: a brief literature review

In the growing need for alternative strategies to effectively curb the escalating rate of conflicts and violence in Solomon Islands over land ownership and chronic corruption in government leadership, an epistemological approach which has been promoted since the 1980s is *governance*. The concept *governance* was first coined by the World Bank and subsequently exported pre-packaged to countries around the world, especially in the global South, as the epistemology deemed most effective for minimising socio-economic and socio-political turmoil.

As if to suggest that governance was not effective enough, the World Bank later coined the sub-genre *good governance* as a more effective form of governance for promoting socio-economic and socio-political equilibrium in societies.[8] The World Bank defines the term as follows:

Good governance includes the creation, protection, and enforcement of property rights, without which the scope for market transactions is limited. It includes the provision of regulatory regime that works with the market to promote competition. And it includes the provision of sound macroeconomic policies that create a stable environment for market activity. Good governance also means the absence of corruption, which can subvert the goals of policy and undermine the legitimacy of public institutions that support markets.[9]

As can be seen from this definition, good governance as the long-awaited panacea for subverting deleterious conditions in countries of the global South is firmly anchored in not one but several

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epistemological and methodological principles or domains, of which the most commonly referenced are *accountability, participation, predictability*, and *transparency*. There are inherent challenges in investing unconditional trust in the frame of good governance. For one, defined even on the basis of a clear understanding of the constituent principles, good governance still eludes a deeper understanding, especially among the general public, of its importance in society. Simai poignantly addresses the issue thus:

the concept of the increasingly fashionable category of "governance" has yet to achieve a universally accepted definition… in certain languages governance simply means "the management of household". Culture, together with other key factors (geographic and historical conditions, for example), is one of the most enduring variables conditioning and influencing the forms and content of governance.[10]

For another, there is a tendency among academics and other professionals to give greater emphasis to economic issues only. This not only blurs or narrows the epistemological scope of good governance but also makes economics seem the only cause of corruption and conflicts, hence explaining the retardation of national development in Pacific Islands and other societies of the global South. The tendency is exacerbated by good governance being top-down, deeply embedded in the epistemologies, methodologies, and ontologies of the global North. This is despite repeated strong arguments to incorporate in good governance bodies of knowledge drawn from the epistemologies, methodologies, axiologies, and ontologies of Pacific Islands and other societies of the global South.[11]

The issue of defining and understanding good governance would perhaps be less cumbersome if it were simply semantic, but it is ontological as well. Ontologically, the challenge stems from the underlying assumptions that the constituent principles of good governance always function maximally well together in every situation when in practice they do not. What actually happens is that the sphere of influence or extent of the effectiveness of each and all of

the principles is determined by human agency which in turn, as Simai has argued,[12] is influenced by cultural, gender, economic, and environmental factors. And speaking more specifically about how good governance is hard to achieve due to the lack of accountability at the intergovernmental and organisational levels, Keohane states that:

the entities conventionally held accountable on a transnational level … are major intergovernmental organizations concerned with economic globalization: the European Union, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. These organizations are major targets of demands for accountability. They certainly have deficiencies in accountability. They do not meet democratic standards of accountability as applied in the best-functioning democracies in our era.[13]

And so, when good governance is achieved it is because human agency maximises the effectiveness of the constituent principles. Thus, for example, if conflict resolution practices in a given society are robust and every person who causes conflict is held *accountable*, then the domain or sphere of effectiveness of *accountability* will expand or intensify. If the same scenario holds for *participation*, *predictability*, and *transparency*, then good governance is realised and society is in a state of socio-political and socio-economic equilibrium. Conflicts and resultant violence are greatly minimised.

However, if human agency counteracts the domains or spheres of effectiveness of the constituent principles, *i.e.*, people are not held accountable for causing conflicts and so conflicts and concomitant violence occur more frequently, then bad governance becomes normalised social practice. The normalisation of behaviours or social practices ordinarily considered antithetical to good governance practices is a red flag to be avoided at all costs, as it means in the final analysis that society has either entered or is on the verge of socio-ontological disequilibrium.

Good governance and conflict resolution: A Kwara'ae indigenous perspective

In Kwara'ae indigenous epistemology and social ontology, good governance and conflict resolution practices are mutually inclusive.

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Conflicts arise because society lacks good governance such as resources being mismanaged—the lack of *transparency*—especially at the national and provincial levels, resulting in social inequality, which provokes the disadvantaged segment of society to take to the streets in angry protest. Conflicts therefore have to be resolved to restore good governance. An alternative reading suggests that the literature on good governance and conflict resolution in some important respects pays inadequate attention to the myriad cultural and environmental factors which can influence the constituent principles and hence the status of good governance and conflict in Kwara'ae. Take, for example, the principle of *participation* which basically argues that, through open dialogue and mutual engagement in events, disputing parties will come to understand one another better and hence settle their differences in a manner conducive to lasting resolution.

However, empirical evidence from Kwara'ae research suggests otherwise. In many instances disputing parties may civilly engage in face-to-face open dialogue and activities yet refuse resolution if, in their hearts and understanding, they believe the causes of conflict to lie elsewhere or issues have been 'resolved' in a manner not respectful of their cultural principles or protocols.

Moreover, the emphasis on the 'lack of understanding' explanation inherent in the principle of *participation* seems excessive. For example, in Kwara'ae culture many chronically unresolved conflicts, some going back in origin to the last century, are between tribes which have known each other inside out through sharing land boundaries and resources, mutual engagement in community development projects, church affiliation, family obligations, *etc*. Besides, many are closely related through marriage. Yet the tenacity with which some of these tribes have clung to the issues causing conflicts between them defies rational thought, whether in Kwara'ae or other Solomon Islands cultures.

For example, one of the tribes most notorious for causing conflicts in Kwara'ae constantly brags about being the first indigenous people in the area to be Christianised, and on the basis of this prides itself on being the most 'modernised' and hence the power-house

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of peace, social justice, and economic development in their communities. The tribe had indeed been involved in different church-related community development projects, none of which had panned out in any meaningful way due, ironically, to the lack of good governance in their management. As for its claim to being an exemplary promoter of good governance, community residents have been contemptuous, arguing rather that it is a notorious chronic instigator of land disputes which have seen it driven from one falsely-claimed land to another. Today the tribe lives precariously on borrowed land, courtesy of the land-owners, apprehensive about where to relocate next should it be asked to leave.

The scenario is not unique to this tribe but is true of many tribes in Kwara'ae and Solomon Islands. It dates back to the 1800s when, in order for Christian missionaries to have easy access to indigenous tribal groups for purposes of religious conversion, large mission villages were built on the coast upon mutual agreement between indigenous tribal land owners and European missionaries. This culminated in an exodus of genealogically unrelated tribes from the mountains to live together in the mission villages. Conflicts arising from clashes between tribes due to different cultural practices was a regular occurrence, which the missionaries had myopically neglected to give serious thought to. Some tribes, over time, tired of the constant conflicts, returned to the mountains, much to the dismay of the missionaries, and successfully reclaimed ownership of their original tribal land. Other tribes were not so fortunate. The scenario has since the 1960s been made worse by globalisation, physically manifested through large-scale logging and other deleterious money-making activities.[14]

From the cases described, it is clear that the 'lack of understanding' explanation inherent in the principle of *participation* seems to mean one thing in metro-centric good governance and conflict resolution discourse and quite another in that of the Kwara'ae. In metro-centric conflict resolution discourse the explanation seems to be that, in order to reach a level of understanding necessary for conflict resolution, members of the quarrelling parties must first develop good rapport among themselves.

In contrast, in Kwara'ae indigenous conflict resolution practices it is important but not absolutely necessary that good rapport be established between rivalling parties as the first step toward conflict resolution. The more important understanding is directed at the causes of conflict and appropriate cultural mechanisms with which to resolve it. In fact, promoting good rapport between rivalling groups is seen as potentially compromising as it can cause a *softening of hearts*, which can make a land dispute resolution based not on facts but emotion.

I would like now to discuss more specifically indigenous governance in Kwara'ae. I reiterate that the objective of this paper is not to debunk the World Bank's version of governance but rather to show that the Kwara'ae, like most cultural groups in Solomon Islands, have been practising governance in varied configurations since time immemorial. Accordingly, when metro-centric governance, or any other metro-centric body of knowledge for that matter, is introduced into Kwara'ae, the objective ideally should be to bilaterally identify points of structural and epistemic confluence between the two distinct paradigms of governance. In this way, a new bi-epistemological paradigm of governance is co-constructed within which local communities promote socio-ontological equilibrium in society.

The argument, admittedly, is not new, in fact is commonplace, yet it is confounding how metro-centric governance, or any other metro-centric bodies of knowledge for that matter, always seem to hold sway *vis-à-vis* indigenous governance when it comes to designing and implementing policies and programs. In short, metro-centric knowledge still dominates, whether for good or ill, reflecting the syndrome of *xenophilia* discussed earlier, whereby the majority of Solomon Islanders show greater preference for metro-centric knowledge and social practices than those of Solomon Islands indigenous cultures. It should be clarified that the argument for the re-embracing of endophilia is not to completely debunk xenophilia, which at this stage in Solomon Islands' development is not possible. The point rather is to strike a balance or identify a point of epi-

stemic and structural confluence where relevant introduced and indigenous bodies of knowledge are applied with equal strength in the building of a society where, despite great cultural and linguistic diversity, all Solomon Islanders can live together in peace and harmony.

Gwaumauri'anga as indigenous good governance

Before the importation of the World Bank's brand of good governance in Solomon Islands in the 1980s to de-escalate rising violence, Kwara'ae, like most Solomon Islands cultural groups, had long developed and been practising their own indigenous governance. This truism is substantiated in myriad ways such as by the indigenous cultural practices of *'adofiku'anga* (inter-dependence) and *tua barangwaiasina'anga* (egalitarianism), which involve Kwara'ae communities always looking out for each other's safety and well-being. Specifically, the Kwara'ae word for good governance or an approximate socio-ontological state of existence is *gwaumauri'anga*.[15]

Gwaumauri'anga is the noun form of *gwaumauri*, an intransitive verb consisting of two morphemes combined, *gwau* which means 'head' and *mauri* which means 'live, alive, or to be living', while *'anga* is the noun form meaning 'the process or state of'. *Tua* is sometimes added before *gwauamauri'anga* to emphasise staying, being, or living at the highest peak of life. Similarly, *tua'a,* which means 'family', 'household', or 'kin group' is sometimes uttered before *gwaumauri* to mean a family or kin group which has achieved the ideal state of *gwaumauri'anga.* Accordingly, a woman, man, or child from such a family or kin group is described as *kini gwaumauri*, *ngwae gwaumauri*, and *ngela gwaumauri* respectively. A *tua'a gwaumari* is generally referred to as *tua'a 'a'ana*, a senior family. And a *gwaumauri* tribe is referred to as *fu'ingwae lalifu*, a firmly rooted tribe.

Gwaumauri'anga, which takes generations to achieve, is defined or characterised by the ownership of an abundance of natural resources such as land replete with virgin forests and food sources of all kinds, flowing streams, and rivers, rolling hills, *etc.*, which makes a tribe self-sufficient and relatively independent. Children and

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adults are healthy and happy and have a sense of self-assuredness and purpose. Families are loving, respectful of other people and willing to help other families and tribes in times of need. They are respected for possessing the human qualities of being peace-loving, humility, intellectual vitality, oratorical skills, leadership skills, stability, high ethical standards, artistic skills, *etc.*

As a human social construct or achievement, *gwaumauri'anga* is, of course, not etched in stone and so is susceptible to change. In light especially of the incessant rupture of Kwara'ae indigenous socio-cultural ontology by the unrelenting forces of globalisation, several Kwara'ae tribes have expressed concern over the sustainability and longevity of their *gwaumauri'anga*. For example, community fission and displacement due to conflicts between indigenous land owners and government-backed transnational logging and mining projects going back to the 1930s have had tremendous adverse impacts on the *gwaumauir'anga* of many Kwara'ae indigenous communities. Colonisation, of course, had also dealt a series of lethal blows to *gwaumauri'anga* in Kwara'ae by indiscriminately destroying indigenous theocracy, leadership, spirituality, and the overall sense of cultural integrity, being, and belonging.[16]

Growing individualism, intrinsic to global materialism, is a culturally egregious new challenge which is also exerting tremendous adverse impact on *gwaumauri'anga* in Kwara'ae society by undermining such important cultural values as *'adofiku'anga* (interdependence), *fangale'a'anga* (sharing), *alafe'anga* (love), *kwaisare'e'anga* (giving without expectation of a return), *etc.* Practised in myriad ways, the phenomenon is most conspicuously enacted in the way certain opportunist tribal members, usually young university-educated males knowingly acting afoul of tribal consent, single-handedly sign behind closed doors lucrative business deals with logging, mining, fishing and/or resource-grabbing transnational business conglomerates. The menace to *gwaumauri'anga* is intensified by a sharp decline in *fa'amanata'anga*, a vitally important indigenous cultural tradition of teaching or counselling through which the ten

key cultural values of Kwara'ae society are passed on to children and young adults.

To be perpetuated for future Kwara'ae generations, *gwaumauri'anga* requires the same community collectivist work ethic and unconditional, deep commitment to Kwara'ae socio-cultural ontology, which had established it in the first place. The positive news, however, is that a tribe cannot actually lose its *gwaumauri'anga* in total once established. Rather, it may go through periods of high and low intensity in its *gwaumauri'anga* such as when, for one reason or another, it is not making any cultural accomplishment or contribution to society and so is publicly viewed as *nene* (quiet, inactive), or *anoano* (hauntingly silent).

Naturally, whispers of curiosity and sometimes malicious ridicule circulate in the communities as to why the once *gwaumauri* tribe seems to be retreating into *anoano'anga* (chilling haunting silence). Suddenly, after some time has passed it emerges with renewed energy and vitality from its *anoano'anga* by way of making a dramatic cultural accomplishment such as throwing a lavish feast to commemorate some important cultural event, which simultaneously also rekindles tribal and community ties in the area and so effectively *ta'efaolo ana* (resurrects or restores) its *gwaumauri'anga*.

Such a public demonstration of resilience to adversity is characteristic of a *gwaumauri* tribe which readily lends credence to the truism that once established, a tribe cannot lose its *gwaumauri'anga* in total, as mentioned. One of the reasons for this is tribal ownership of abundant natural resources such as land, which literally form the bedrock of tribal *gwaumauri'anga*. It should also be mentioned that, rapid social change notwithstanding, periods of low intensity are rarely experienced in *gwaumauri'anga*.

Epistemic constituents of gwaumauri'anga

In discussions of good governance as conceived by the World Bank, academics and other professionals tend to emphasise the four key principles mentioned earlier—namely *accountability, participation, predictability,* and *transparency*—as foundational. Of the four prin-

ciples, *accountability* and *transparency* tend to be given the greatest weight as being the most indispensable for realising good governance. The other two principles are usually mentioned in passing.

By contrast, *gwaumauri'anga* is firmly anchored in ten or more key cultural principles, namely: *alafe'anga* (kin love, kindness); *aroaro'anga* (peace, peacefulness); *babato'o'anga* (stability, calmness); *enoeno'anga* (humility); *fangale'a'anga* (sharing); *kwaigwale'e'anga* (welcoming, comforting, hospitality); *kwaima'anga* (love, kindness); *kwaisare'e'anga* (giving without expectation of a return); *saesaele'a'anga* (happiness, gladness); and *mamana'anga* (truth, honesty, sacred power).[17] The ten key cultural principles are always evoked with equal weight in the adjudication of community disputes over land and other issues and discussions of Kwara'ae socio-cultural ontology more generally, especially in *fa'amanata'anga*, as discussed shortly.

I will now discuss in detail some of the key epistemic constituents of *gwaumauri'anga* to give an idea of the nature of each and how in maximally functioning well together as a system they keep *gwaumauri'anga* and hence Kwara'ae society on a socio-ontological equilibrium. In the interest of time and space I will be discussing only five of the epistemic constituents.

Alafe'anga: The arm that binds in Kwara'ae society

Of all the key cultural values identified by Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo, *alafe'anga* reigns supreme as the all-embracing value of Kwara'ae indigenous socio-cultural ontology. *Alafe'nga* can be so described because it is the cultural principle through which all the cultural values constituting Kwara'ae indigenous socio-cultural ontology are publicly expressed in everyday social behaviour. *Alafe'anga,* in other words, is the all-embracing cultural value which interconnects and permeates all the cultural values and through which the practice of all Kwara'ae key cultural values are mirrored.

Alafe'anga is composed of the verb *alafe-* which means 'to love' or 'to be loving' in the sense of kin love, and the noun-form *-anga* which means 'the act or process of loving'. It is clear that without *alafe'anga* no Kwara'ae cultural value can be cognitively constructed,

much less physically practised such as *gwaumauri'anga*. The all-embracing value of *alafe'anga* is shown by the fact that it is the cultural value which is always strongly emphasised in all forms of social discourse in Kwara'ae society, from *fa'amanata'anga*, the epistemology of formal cultural socialisation, to *kwalabasa'anga,* the epistemology of everyday social interaction.[18]

Alafe can be used to describe the behaviour of an individual, a family, village, tribe, or community. A person who is described as *alafe* or having *alafe'anga* is also described as *ali'afu*, being whole or complete, in the sense of having mastery of and living according to the key cultural principles of Kwara'ae indigenous socio-cultural ontology. Similarly, a child who shows a proclivity for *alafe'anga* is touted as being on the path to achieving *ali'afu'anga*.

Alafe'anga's indispensable role is apparent in that all the key cultural values perform their respective roles in upholding *gwaumauri'anga* at its command. For example, *aroaro'anga* (peace or tranquillity) strongly reflects *alafe'anga*, as does *amani'anga* (truth, honesty, vitality). In the final analysis, *alafe'anga* can be described as the principal social force which connects all the key cultural values and informs them of their respective roles in ensuring *gwaumauri'anga*, and therefore Kwara'ae society as a whole, stays in balance.

Ali'afu'anga: The holism of Kwara'ae society

Ali'afu'anga, one of the key cultural principles of Kwara'ae indigenous socio-cultural ontology, is the noun form of the verb *ali'afu* which, loosely translated into English, means 'to be complete' as in a circle or cycle or process. The word consists of two morphemes, *ali-* which means twirl or spin around as of a rope around a tree, and -*'afu* which means 'complete'. It is the view, or sense, of completion or completeness in a cycle or process where every part dovetails so perfectly that no flaw or deformity can be detected. Thus, for example, when all the parts required to complete a task or process have been assembled and the task is completed to the ultimate degree of expert performance such that no flaw can be detected, the

task is described as *ali'fu*. The slightest deformity renders the work flawed, *'iri 'ali'afu*, not complete and so unacceptable. *Ali'afu* can also be applied to the acquisition of knowledge or skills in a subject such as history, genealogy, culture, *etc.* such as an individual who possesses an expansive body of knowledge about something as to be highly respected as a tribal elder or leader and is called *gwaunga'i*, head-hood or head-ness.

Epistemologically, *ali'afu'anga* can perhaps be aptly defined by the concepts of *epistemic holism* or *epistemic ambidexterity* when used in reference to people, in that an *ali'afu* person is someone who is well-rounded in commanding both theoretical and practical knowledge in some field of study or expertise in Kwara'ae indigenous culture. Ultimately, *ali'afu'anga* conveys the notion of a cycle, process, need, or goal having reached or been achieved at the highest peak of success.

Kwalongwae'anga: Endless love in Kwara'ae society

The root word of the noun *kwalongwae'anga* is *kwalongwae*, which is two morphemes combined: *kwalo* meaning string or twine, and *ngwae* meaning human or person; *'anga* is the noun form and means the process or state of. As a principle in Kwara'ae indigenous socio-cultural ontology, *kwalongwae'anga* means the welcoming of people or humans. However, more fundamentally, it connotes the idea of boundless love that welcomes endlessly no matter how long the queue of people is.

Kwalongwae'anga's indispensable role in *gwaumauri'anga* is obvious in that a *gwaumauri* tribe or individual is one which habitually shows endless and unconditional love for other people regardless of the circumstances. Accordingly, a typical scenario of a *kwalongwae* family is one in which a mother meets at the village entrance and leads a long queue of visiting relatives to her house, engaging them in warm, welcoming, casual conversation. The husband in the meantime is waiting in the house to receive the visitors, showing them where to sit, *etc.* while food is being prepared. If he is away in the gardens, the mother will send one of her daughters or sons to

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collect him. The guests and members of the host family will be addressing one another not by their real names but by kin terms such as aunt, mother, son, sister, father, uncle, cousins, *etc.* to evoke and reaffirm the sacrosanctity of genealogy. At the end of the visit, the couple and their family members and relatives will see their guests off at the village entrance the same way they welcomed them on arrival.

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Ala'anga: The social discourse of Kwara'ae society

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The ten key cultural values that constitute the essence of *tua gwaumauri'anga* are taught through an indigenous cultural tradition or epistemology called *fa'amanata'anga* .[19] So fundamental to *tua gwaumauri'anga* in Kwara'ae society is *fa'amanata'anga* that every Kwara'ae child as young as two or three years is introduced to it by his or her parents or older siblings. *Fa'amanata'anga* is nestled in and conducted through another cultural tradition called *ala'anga* (talk, meeting, or council).

Held usually in the village *gwaurau* (meeting house), either in the morning, afternoon, or evening, formal *ala'anga* is a public event in which different kinds of conflicts are heard, from simple conflicts such as two young children fighting to more serious and complicated ones such as land disputes. *Ala'anga* to settle simple matters are usually presided over by the village chief or chiefs. Evidence is presented and adjudicated according to the principles of Kwara'ae *falafala* (culture). For example, after everybody has gathered in the *gwaurau*, the presiding chief would open the *ala'anga* by making the pronouncement that there has been some *firu'a* (entanglement) in the village and he has called for an *ala'anga* to *fa'asaga* (straighten out) and *rokea* (disentangle) it.

Based on the evidence presented to him and the other village residents, the chief renders his verdict. He would then close his remarks by emphasising that *gwaumauri'anga* is the tower of force or strength at whose feet they dwell, or the *bibi* (foundation) of Kwara'ae society. *Gwaumauri'anga* emerges from the ten key cultural principles practised in totality. After the conflict has been resolved,

the village chief or elder would then call upon a village elder or elders to start the *fa'amanata'anga* in light of the conflict. Occasionally, a village chief might invite another chief or chiefs, usually ones more senior than him, from other villages to adjudicate a conflict if he cannot do it himself.

Fa'amanata'anga: Kwara'ae epistemology of counselling and conflict resolution

Ala'anga embraces another cultural event for conflict resolution and the teaching of cultural values and social practices called *fa'amanata'anga*, translated in English to roughly mean 'shape the mind', 'cause to think', or 'counselling'.[20] An elaborate discussion of how *fa'amanata'anga* is done is provided by Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (2014).[21] *Fa'amanata'anaga* is cross-generational in that members of the younger and older generations are involved with the *fa'amanata* (counsellors), who are chiefs or elders. There are two kinds of *fa'amanata'anga*: private, *fono*, and public, *'ifi*. Public *fa'amanata'anga* usually involves a large gathering of people such as a whole village, an extended kin group, or even a tribe. It is, however, not open to just anybody. For example, any non-kin visitor to the village noticing a *fa'amanata'anga* in session will leave immediately out of respect for its sacrosanctity. The most noticeable sign of a *fa'amanata'anga* in session is silence in the village. Children are kept at home and told not to make any noise. Adults converse in a low and whispering manner. It is usually held in the *gwaurau,* the village meeting house, either in the late afternoon or evening.

Public *fa'amanata'anga* may be deemed necessary for two reasons. First, an event has occurred such as violation of a cultural taboo or land dispute which has caused social instability in a village or community and needs to be resolved to restore socio-ontological equilibrium. After the dispute has been resolved, *fa'amanata'anga* then follows. Second, it is an occasion on which tribal chiefs and other elders may simply wish to bring their people together to touch base on village or community matters after some time has passed. The topics covered usually are the epistemic constituents of *gwaumauri'anga.* However, the presiding chief may also request from the

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audience other important topics for *fa'amanata'anga*, such as community women feeling that their important traditional role as productive members of Kwara'ae society is constantly being eroded by the forces of globalisation. The presiding chief will ask the proponent of a topic to briefly describe it, after which he and other village elders then start *fa'amanata'anga*.

Private *fa'amanta'anga*, in contrast, is an exclusive family affair in which parents counsel their children behind closed doors usually in the evening after dinner. The parents take turns in *fa'amanata'anga* with the topics ranging from simple everyday etiquettes to the more serious epistemic constituents of *gwaumauri'anga*. However, a session could also address more specifically the misbehaviour of one of the children in the family such as petty theft or negligence to carry out an assigned family task. The misbehaving child is interrogated as to the reasons for the misbehaviour. The parents emphasise how the misbehaviour is having a negative impact on both their reputation and that of the family. Private *fa'amanata'anga* occurs more frequently than public *fa'amanata'anga*.

Fa'amanata'anga stands on precarious ground

Today *fa'amanata'anga*, disturbingly, stands on precarious ground, the result of new developments, the most authoritarian of which, ironically, is the proliferation of metro-centric-style schools and education in rural communities. The proliferation has in effect rendered obsolete—'their time is finished'—women and men most renowned and respected for their depth and breadth of indigenous knowledge and *fa'amanata'anga* skills in Kwara'ae society. The situation is compounded by the current generation of Kwara'ae parents looking to metro-centric-trained school teachers and schools as the structural and epistemic transformation of traditional elders and the community respectively, and so expect them to be solely responsible for the *fa'amanata'anga* of their children.

No attitude, of course, could be more myopic. An effective and talented *fa'amanata'anga* teacher is not university-educated but rather firmly steeped in Kwara'ae *falafala* (culture or socio-cultural onto-

logy) by virtue of having been socialised through *fa'amanata'anga* since early childhood and practising it in adulthood. *Fa'amanata'anga*'s menacing demise is exacerbated by the proliferation in rural and urban communities of store-bought videos, mobile phones, and other technical gadgetry on which children and young adults watch foreign movies, and play games and music for hours instead of attending *fa'amanta'anga* sessions when held.

The neglect or refusal of *fa'amanata'anga* by the present generation of Kwara'ae women and men is a regrettable case of poor judgment, which entails losing more than just a supposedly archaic cultural tradition. More fundamentally and seriously, the neglect entails being deprived of access to the epistemic conduit or vehicle through which the very essence or core substance of Kwara'ae indigenous socio-cultural ontology is passed onto future generations of Kwara'ae, namely: epistemology, ontology, hermeneutics, methodology, axiology, critical thinking skills, the proper use of Kwara'ae language, oratory, spirituality, cultural etiquette, genealogical knowledge, *etc.*

The possession of these bodies of knowledge amounts to *ali'afu'anga,* the socio-ontological state of human development and intellectual maturity which defines and towards which all Kwara'ae women and men strive in life. In the final analysis, *fa'amanata'anga* is in effect the cultural epistemology, methodology, and axiology through which a Kwara'ae person is able to construct the ultimate desired identity of *tua 'o'olo'anga*, living in righteousness, cognisant of the difference between right and wrong. Furthermore, while *gwaumauri'anga* is anchored in land, it is *fa'amanata'anga* which nurtures it by virtue of instilling in generations of Kwara'ae cultural values and behaviours indispensable for upholding and perpetuating it, as evidenced by the epistemic constituent principles discussed.

Conclusion

On the heels of political decolonisation in the 1960s followed in the 1970s and 1980s *epistemic decolonisation* or the decolonisation of

knowledge construction and use in both the global North and global South. Most audacious and articulate in the movement were and are women of diverse ethnicities and disciplinary persuasions who targeted what they saw as the historically overbearing and androcentric nature or taste of knowledge construction and use globally. That is, knowledge construction has historically been the prerogative of white middle-class males and therefore predominantly reflects their truth and belief. The experience and epistemological capability of women and minority groups have historically been either belittled or simply denied legitimacy in knowledge construction and use.

Meanwhile, in the global South, epistemic decolonisation was and still is a step behind the global North, in that the primary target was and is not so much the de-masculinisation of the epistemic contents of the social construction of knowledge *per se*, but rather the prevention or control of the wholesale importation of culturally irrelevant and often outmoded metro-centric knowledge and accompanying technology. The practice continues unabated despite repeated strong arguments by researchers and educators in both the global North and global South to contextualise metro-centric knowledge so as to make it more culturally and epistemically relevant and to therefore have a greater success rate or applicability in the activities, such as national development, for which it was and is imported into the global South.

Good governance as imported from the World Bank by the Solomon Islands government in the 1980s as the long-awaited panacea for national catastrophe fell short of its intended purpose because it was culturally and epistemically irrelevant, and deployed in a context of chronic mismanagement in the Solomon Islands. Kwara'ae *gwaumauri'anga* is an example of Solomon Islands indigenous good governance which, because of epistemic and cultural relevance, has mitigating potential for de-escalating chronic conflicts and concomitant violence nationally. It is confounding that the great wealth of indigenous knowledge embedded in *gwaumauri'anga* and other Solomon Islands indigenous governance, having such indefatigable

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capacity to produce lasting resolutions to national conflicts, is hardly tapped into by national planners and decision-makers.

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