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Abstract

The paper presents an argument for a broader and more complex definition of environment than that currently offered in sustainable development discourse and practice. Sustainable development is rooted in dominant western rational and instrumental scientific representations of human-environment relationships. As such, it has been criticised as misrepresentative and meaningless for many of those for whom it is intended. Recent contributions by social scientists have emphasized the need to move beyond the narrow construction of the human-environment dichotomy found in western scientific rhetoric. These emerging 'new ecologies' advocate a re-imagining of human-environment relationships as holistic, connective, and relational, and as a product of direct perception and active engagement in the world. The Boumā National Heritage Park, Fiji, a community-based ecotourism initiative is presented as a case study to identify discrepancies between indigenous perceptions of the environment and those of formally educated western development practitioners, as well as the potential for ongoing convergence.

Key words: sustainable development, community-based ecotourism, sentient ecology, indigenous epistemologies, indigenous knowledge, ecological humanities.

Biographical Note

Trisia Farrelly has recently completed her doctorate and currently teaches Social Anthropology at Massey University. Having spent some time working, volunteering, and researching in developing countries, she has developed a keen interest in community-based indigenous development and indigenous entrepreneurship.

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Introduction

This paper discusses 'environment' as a cultural construct in sustainable development, particularly as it relates to indigenous epistemologies. First, environment is presented as it is used in sustainability discourse and practice. Emerging projects aimed at broadening the definition and application of the environment are then offered as alternatives to dominant western applications of the term. This is followed by a case study of the way the Boumā people of Fiji imagine their environment and their relationship to it. The case study shows the discrepancies between a Western scientific notion of environment applied through sustainable development and that of the Boumā people. It also exposes the weaknesses of environment as it is included in western-based sustainable development, most starkly when applied in an indigenous context. In this paper, I argue for a reimagining of environment in sustainable development which renders it more holistic, fluid, connective and relational than dominant western scientific cultural constructions and thus more cross-culturally relevant.

'Environment' in sustainable development discourse and practice

At no other time have the social sciences and humanities dedicated so much attention to the environment (Pezzoli, 1997). Since the early 1980s, sustainable development has transcended the classical development paradigm, to emphasise the confluence of its three constitutive parts: environmental, economic and social sustainability. However, different models of sustainable development have been variously criticised for their western scientific, economic, socio-cultural, patriarchal, and political bias (e.g. Braidotti et al. 1994, Kothari 2002, Lewis 2005, Loomis 2002, Nandy 1987 and 1989, Ruddle and Hickey 2008, Shiva 1989). Instrumental rational concepts of sustainability tend to ignore or downplay local knowledge and epistemologies, micropolitics, and histories and many versions of development have also been criticized, or at least described, as normative (Lightfoot and Burchell 2005), technocentric (Gladwin et al. 1995), anthropocentric (Campbell 1996, Gladwin et al. 1995), or ecocentric (Gorobets 2006).

Sustainability discourse assumes that terms such as 'sustainability', 'biological diversity', 'conservation', and 'environment' are or should be, understood, valued and applied cross-culturally. This is largely due to the erroneous assumption in western science that all cultures share a universal worldview: that of a world of humans *and* their environment rather than a world of humans *in* their environment and that humans bear the responsibility to control (read 'sustain') the environment (Gladwin et al. 1995). This privileging of humans over the environment is a concept central to sustainable development (Giddings et al. 2002) and one which is constantly emphasized by advances in technology and alternative forms of resource use.

Most social scientists agree that humans can only know or act indirectly on their environments through the medium of their cultural representations. This is illustrated in sustainable development by its provision of a largely atomised representation of the environment—one that systematically and instrumentally separates the world into discrete taxonomies e.g. into species and subspecies of flora and fauna. However, the way western science culturally constructs the world does not reflect the lived reality of all people. This misrepresentation of others' perceptions of place is most profound when referring to indigenous human-environment relationships. It is the

culture-nature dichotomy presented in sustainable development discourse and practice that is most at odds with the world's estimated 300 million indigenous peoples (Toledo 2001) and a good many others besides. Recently, however, interdisciplinary alternatives to this approach have been offered in the academy.

Alternative and interdisciplinary approaches

Most scholars assert that global environmental crises are no longer dealt with as purely economic, socio-cultural or environmental and that to fully understand environmental problems requires attention to the complex whole. While this is not yet the general trend, efforts are being made to bridge the gap between science and the humanities in order to meet this requirement. The sub-disciplines of social science and humanities are seeking answers to as yet unanswered questions surrounding diverse human-environment relationships. One example of this paradigmatic shift can be found in a relatively new multidisciplinary ecology. Deborah Bird Rose and Libby Robin (Rose and Robin 2004; Robin 2008), Val Plumwood (2002), and others call this new approach 'ecological humanities'.

The ecological humanities are characterised by a 'connectivity ontology' which assumes that 'connections between and among living things are the basis for how ecosystems are understood to work, and thus constitute laws of existence and guidelines for behaviour' (Rose and Robin 2004: para. 28). Drawing on the work of Gregory Bateson, the ecological humanities is founded on the notion that the unit of survival is the organism-in-its-environment rather than the species or the individual as western science would have us understand (Bateson 1972). Therefore, an organism that continuously harms its environment is in the process of committing suicide. Proponents of the ecological humanities urgently request answers to the following question:

> how [may] we…avoid committing suicide through failure to enact the worldview shattering knowledge that the unit of survival is the organism in recursive and mutually constitutive relationships with its environment (Rose and Robin 2004: para. 6).

Underlying this shift in thought, is the recognition that:

> being is inherently, inescapably, and necessarily relational. An ontology of connectivity entails mutual causality: organism and environment modify each other. Relations between organism and environment are recursive, meaning that 'events continually enter into, become entangled with, and then re-enter the universe they describe' [Harries-Jones 1995:3] (ibid).

The attempt is then largely to facilitate a shift from atomism to connectivity (Matthews 1993), and from certainty to dealing creatively with uncertainty (Prigogine 1996). This requires a revolutionary shift in thought for ecologists 'from concepts of climax and equilibrium to pervasive disequilibrium' (Rose and Robin 2004: para. 4), and from cultural and environmental determinism to intersubjective approaches. Under the axioms of ecological humanities, ecologists, like social scientists, will also need to shift from universal knowledge to situated knowledge (Gegeo 2001; Harding 1993).

While Rose and Robin's ecological humanities regularly refers to ecosystems, in actuality, they appear to be arguing against a systems approach more in line with

the work of environmental philosopher and integral ecologist Michael Zimmerman. Zimmerman informs us that many ecological scientists no longer support the ecosystem model, attending instead to population dynamics which

> assumes that large-scale natural processes are not functions of an overarching 'system', but rather are the unintended effects of the decisions made by countless individual organisms seeking to maximize their fitness. In addition to denying that ecosystems exist, these ecologists add that natural processes—far from being characterized by stability, integrity, and balance—are characterized by chaos, constant flux, and relatively [sic] unpredictability[1] (2001: 243).

Some systems approaches have also been criticised for leaving culture out of the equation (Milton, 1996) or at least suggesting culture is shared and not contested. Many ecosystems approaches (including examples of human ecology) have ignored historical factors, the role of the individuals, and local, social, political, religious values as they were intended. Often, cultural symbolism is reduced to ecological function: largely a product of ecologists' obsession with calories (homeostasis and equilibrium) and its tendency toward technological determinism. There is also the problem of boundary definition: how can the boundaries of an ecosystem be located (Moran, 1990)?

For social scientists, the ecological humanities, like sentient ecology and integral ecology, require a focus less on structure, cognition, and rationalism and more on motion, action, and critical praxis. Less on the mono-glossia and more on the heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981); less on centred hierarchies and more on decentred political networks; less on substance and more on relations, communications, and time (Rose and Robin 2004). All of these shifts in focus should also reflect the ways in which academics, scientists, writers and practitioners engage with one another to contribute in a more meaningful and inclusive way to cross-cultural sustainable development projects. This also has profound implications for participatory models of development.

The origins for this call for a greater attention to connectivities and intersubjectivities derive from a plethora of indigenous-based ethnographic case studies. The culmination of these case studies may be found in David Anderson's (2000) 'sentient ecology' and Tim Ingold's more thorough 'anthropology of dwelling' (1993, 1995, and 2000). These phenomenologically-informed approaches dissolve culture-environment dualisms. Humans and non-humans are imagined as an ongoing project involving the construction of one other within the same process: being and dwelling in the world. Epistemological and ontological understandings of the world are constantly shaped through humans' practical engagement with other elements of the environment. The result is an intellectual journey toward an 'ecology of life' (Ingold 2000) in which the environment and its human elements are included in a single concept. This approach is congruent with a sense of environmental concern because, much like Bateson's (1972) statement about suicide, by dwelling in our environment, we must ensure its well-being and continuation (Milton 1996). Similarly, integral ecologist, Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, and environmental philosopher, Michael Zimmerman, draw on phenomenology and hermeneutics (as just two of eight 'methodological zones') in

[1] See Donald Worster (1993: 39-43), and Zimmerman (1996).

this emerging inter-subjective and inter-objective approach to human-environment relationships (2009).

Sustainable development as a cultural construct based on dominant western epistemologies and ontologies are presented as broad statements about how humans should engage with the rest of their environment—not just locally but globally. Discourse involving sustainable development, particularly those by international government organisations, is constructed for 'no-place-in-particular'. This 'dislocated' global discourse may be meaningless to particular peoples in particular locales. Sentient ecology, the dwelling perspective and ecological humanities contribute to a less dislocated sustainable development paradigm. These approaches encourage 'developments *of* the particular *by* the particular'. This is not to suggest that sustainable development becomes another casualty of postmodern deconstructionism. Rather, it proposes to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue between plural and diverse knowledges and by bridging and enlarging the sciences to include pre-existing knowledge and the new and innovative cultural forms that result.

The following is a brief example of a development *of* the particular *by* the particular from my doctoral fieldwork in the Boumā National Heritage Park, Fiji between 2004 and 2006. Drawing on the *vanua* as an indigenous epistemology, this example illustrates why it is vital that we combine the local expert knowledges of diverse cultural communities with other sciences and humanities. The Park's community-based ecotourism initiatives based on principles of sustainable development is one example of the extent that Indigenous perceptions of their environment and those of development practitioners and researchers trained from a western scientific perspective are at odds despite years of colonial impact and cultural change in general. However, this does not imply a lack of space for continued cultural convergence and negotiation. The question is, on whose terms does this occur?

Case study: Boumā National Heritage Park

In 1990, the Boumā tribe of Taveuni, Fiji established the Boumā National Heritage Park. A growing dependence on the market economy and a desire to find an economic alternative to commercial logging on their communally-tenured land, led to their decision to approach the New Zealand government for assistance to establish the Park. The four villages involved have since developed their own community-based ecotourism enterprises. There was a growing sense of social dysfunction in Boumā during the research period (2004–06). According to many of my participants, this was partly due to the community-based ecotourism development process which had paid little attention to the *vanua*. The *vanua* is a complex cultural system which involves inter-relational and interdependent social, environmental, and spiritual components. In Boumā, the non-human elements of the environment are considered essentially social, political, and spiritual by most of the community. The *vanua* as a mutually constitutive environment was not a priority in project planning and management by external development consultants (including international and national specialists). This lack of attention to the *vanua* is also recognised as representative of the approach adopted by the contemporary Fiji government. The Fiji government has long been wrestling with ways to balance core *vanua* values of communality and spiritual ties to the land with its status as a 'modern' nation state.

Since the development consultants stepped back from the running of the projects in 2006, the people of Boumā have become increasingly conscious of the ways in which they incorporate the *vanua* in the evaluation and management of their projects. This

article will focus on the *vanua* as it relates to the physical environment while stressing the interconnectedness of the physical to the social and cosmological.

The vanua and the physical environment

Fijians do not treat native land as a commodity that can be 'owned' in the capitalist sense of the word. This is illustrated in the expression '*na qau vanua'* – not my land but 'the land to which I belong, of which I am an integral part: the land that is part of me and feeds me' (Roth 1973:xxvii) (see also Lasaqa 1984:22). As Tuwere states, 'One does not own the land, the land owns him' (2002:49). Land is something that, if alienated from a Fijian person, has far-reaching implications for their identity and well-being, his/her tribe, and for the ancestors of that land. The following quote was made by an unnamed journalist and recorded by Ewins (1998):

> To the Fijian, land is not something that will help them economically; land is everything. It's like God. Everything on that land matters…They pray to the land…They call [it] *vanua*; that stone, that animal, that insect; all these are part of [it]. When the Fijian talks of land [they're] not just talking about acreage, they're talking about everything on that land, which is very sacred to them (cited in Halapua 2003:83).

A sense of place and identity is further strengthened by the totems, spirits and ancestors to which both the land and the people belong. The intimate relationship of people and land are further demonstrated in that many Fijians consider themselves nothing without their land while they may also liken a land without its people to 'a person without a soul' (Ravuvu 1983:76). Some people considered leasing their land out to foreign investors in Boumā when given an offer they found hard to turn down. However, they were chastised by others who labelled them 'greedy' and who questioned their values, their commitment to their community, their family, and their ancestors. They also questioned their sanity (what would their future generations eat if they leased their arable land?). Because the environment provides all that is needed for the survival of the Boumā people, they in turn understand that they must protect it. If they do not, they receive an indication, through signs and symbols from nature, that they must alter their treatment of the environment.

Silent messages

In Boumā, what locals refer to as 'silent messages' are given to people through other human as well as non-human elements of their environment. These silent messages show the interrelatedness of the Boumā people to the physical and the spiritual aspects of their environment. These once came exclusively from *vū* (ancestral spirits). Today, due to missionisation, Vanua Boumā (the Boumā tribe) is governed by God, the ancestors, and their worldly chiefs. Symbols from the environment originating in pre-Christian *vū* worship have been combined with Christianity to create what appears to be one of the strongest mechanisms of social control in Boumā—arguably more powerful than the present state of chiefly leadership. This social control comes from the ways in which the Boumā people look to symbols from their natural and social environment to verify knowledge.

It is the symbolism or silent messages that inform the Boumā people whether or not they are following 'the straight path' of the *vanua* (inferring social integrity and communality) or whether they are on the 'crooked path' (Katz 1999) and pursuing what is generally considered 'selfish individualism'. Through these symbols, God and

vū control the Boumā people to some extent by reward or punishment. It is through these symbols that the people of Boumā determine the extent to which the ecotourism initiatives are leading to a sense of overall community wellbeing, peace and prosperity or whether they are going in the wrong direction by not adhering to *vanua* laws and values. The symbols, then, inform decision-making regarding community-based ecotourism and other village-based development decisions.

Totems perform the role of ensuring the adherence of the values of the *vanua* and environmental sustainability because they determine linkages between different *yavusa* (subtribes) and between the *yavusa* and the land. Consequently, they contribute to the integrity of the tribe. Through the symbolic nature of totems, the *vū* governs by rewarding and punishing the observance of *vanua* values and integrity, and in so doing ensures the correct treatment of the environment. Adherence to *vanua* values by loving one another, helping one another, and observing *tabu* is also rewarded by God and *vū* with tribe-specific symbols from the natural environment: tribe-specific because each tribe has its uniquely recognisable signs. One such example of tribe-specific symbols is totems.

Totems can reinvigorate the sense of *vanua* integrity when their distribution is conducted strategically. One of the *yavusa* was very careful about the way their community members distributed their totem fish when I observed its ritual harvest in 2004. The chief of the *yavusa* (*turaga ni yavusa*) ensured the *Vunisā* (Head Chief of the larger tribe) received the first of the harvest, and then that all in the tribe equitably received their share. In the gathering and careful distribution of the fish, there was a palpable sense of love of, and respect for community. In the climate of uncertainty at that time as to the social integrity of the tribe, the totem fish could not have come at a better time. This was just what was needed to reinvigorate a sense of unity between the *yavusa* and hope for the future of the tribe as social coherence had begun to 'unravel'. Many from Yavusa Naisaqai interpreted the abundance of their harvest in 2004 as directly related to the Waitabu Marine Reserve project (one of the four ecotourism initiatives in the Park) implying that the ecotourism management there was 'right' and 'just'. As a consequence, the Naisaqai community felt reassured that they were following the straight path.

There are other tribe-specific signs other than totems which were also referred to as 'silent truths', 'silent messages', or 'gifts' by some in Boumā and, in addition to symbolising *sautu* (peace and prosperity), they were considered particularly by elders, as the most profound evidence of the legitimacy of land boundaries of tribes, clans and leadership. Examples of other Fijian tribes' 'gifts' reported by the people of Boumā included the people of Beqa's firewalking (Pigliasco 2007) and in Koro, the people could call '*Tui ni kasi, tui ni kasi vudi mada*!' and the turtles would float to the top of the sea (see also Guinea and Apia 1993).

All of Boumā as well as other Fijian tribes knew that Boumā's unique silent message of peace and prosperity is customarily given in the form of a great black cloud over large tribal gatherings followed by rain. This was also referred to as a 'blessing'. One local woman explains:

> Sometimes it is near the middle of the function just before they go to the place where they perform their dance. You will see a black cloud gathering and it will rain. And then towards the end it will stop. And when they leave the rain will go with them.

Following is an example of how the dark clouds and rain signified social integrity and respect for *vanua* values and laws in the planning and establishment of the Tavoro Falls ecotourism project in the Park:

> After Tavoro Falls was finished everyone from Boumā came—ministers and everyone and the food had just been served and it went so dark and there was very heavy rain and plates filled up with water. This means everything is right. The people went to perform, went in the rain.

However, the impact of tourism was not always positive and symbols manifest themselves in other ways. If tourism was having a negative impact on Boumā and its people because it obstructed social and environmental well-being, it was understood that misfortune would befall the tribe. Misfortune included social conflict, diminishing fish stocks, denutrification or erosion of the soil, and poor crop production: This was explained by a woman in Lavena during a particularly bad period of intra-tribal conflict in Boumā during my fieldwork period:

> I have an idea about Boumā. People say that Boumā people are very good. They have tourism and this and that but I think there must be something wrong because if everything was alright here, everything would go right.

This case study clearly illustrates the need for a shift in sustainable development toward not only a more connective and inter-relational approach to the environment but also toward a more cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary sustainable development paradigm. This is supported by Morgan (2007), who, writing about his longitudinal study in the Wainikeli District in Taveuni (near Boumā) notes that debates over resource management and economic development seldom include the spiritual significance of elements of the environment. This is despite an abundance of literature written about the Pacific which identifies the fundamental spiritual connection of people and place to economic relationships (see also Ravuvu 1983; Tuwere 2002).

The Bouma environment as a 'taskscape'

Despite the dominance of the sustainable development paradigm, most of the world's indigenous people imagine the world more in line with Boumā's *vanua*. In this epistemological framing, the human/environment dichotomy does not exist. Many indigenous peoples see themselves as taxonomically inter-related and often indistinguishable from the non-human elements of their environment. Despite introduced values and knowledge over time, the Boumā people remain dependent on the physical and spiritual elements as well as the social networks that constitute the complex whole that is their environment. In addition, the non-human elements of their environment are largely contingent on human action. The non-human environment not only includes the physical but also the cosmological.

The *vanua* represents a sentient ecology (Anderson 2000). From his studies of reindeer herders in the central Siberian Taimyr region, David Anderson describes the herders' relationship with their environment and other animals as operating with a sentient ecology. This intuitive relationship involves knowledge which Tim Ingold describes as

> …not of a formal, authorised kind, transmissible in contexts outside those of its practical application. On the contrary, it is

> based in feeling, consisting in the skills, sensitivities and orientations that have developed through long experience of conducting one's life in a particular environment (2000:25).

The people of Boumā like the Evenki of the Siberian Taiyr see the environment as a 'taskscape' rather than a 'landscape'. In other words, their world is not divided into humans and their environment and further subdivided into subcategories in the same way an ecologist or biologist would view the world. Rather animals, humans and other environmental features are all interrelated elements of their world. And, '[j]ust as the landscape is an array of related features, so—by analogy—the taskscape is an array of related activities' (Ingold 2000:195). The taskscape then is a pattern of dwelling activities within the landscape and both taskscape and landscape are perpetually in process rather than in a static or otherwise immutable state (Ingold 1993). Ingold's taskscape is his answer to what he describes as the one of the 'great mistakes of recent anthropology'—that it has ignored the fact that human technical skills are embedded in sociality (Ingold 2000:195). In addition, that sociality is embedded in the landscape. This includes the widest interpretation of environment to a people, for example, one inclusive of the cosmological dimension in Boumā's case. For those who work within the sustainable development paradigm, reimagining Boumā's environment as a taskscape requires opening the mind to the possibilities of alternative inter-relational, subjective, embodied and reflexive understandings of the world.

The *vanua* concept as the predominant Boumā worldview produces its own set of dwelling activities within the Boumā landscape. Just as Ingold's taskscape implies, interpretations of life lived *va'avanua* (the *vanua* way) is in constant flux and moves with no pre-determined pattern within an equally dynamic landscape. This premise suggests then that the cultural project is one that can only be imagined as 'in process' and that there is no completed product. By-products of this process may be seen as culturally-hybridised forms.

Cultural hybridisations of the Bouma taskscape

Even alternative sustainable development models such as community-based ecotourism as a form of participatory development, suggest indigenous knowledge may be extracted systematically and instrumentally, and local knowledge formation is often ignored. Indigenous traditional knowledge has often been treated as historically and culturally valuable and yet static and, therefore, problematic and largely irrelevant to sustainable development. However, '[in] reality, Indigenous peoples are in a constant process of retheorising, recreating, and restructuring knowledge' (Gegeo 2002:381). Knowledge passed down through many generations may be amalgamated with new knowledge introduced through sustainable development as part of this ongoing dynamic process. This was certainly the case for Boumā with their endeavours to culturally hybridise the *vanua* with western capitalist-based entrepreneurship to produce emerging examples of what they call 'business *va'avanua*' (Farrelly 2009).

Despite the modification of the term *vanua* through engagement with the global market economy and colonialism, the essence remains ingrained in the psyches of the Boumā people. Batibasaqa, Overton and Horsely (1999) suggest that the *vanua* could be used to develop an 'an alternative set of values, based in the past but aware of the present, that can act as an effective counter to dominant ideologies of resource development and exploitation' (p.106). Academia is showing an increasing interest in indigenous development and indigenous entrepreneurship. Research in

these areas focuses on the amalgamation of local perceptions and relationships associated with the environment and those offered by outsiders through sustainable development initiatives. An indigenous Fijian example of this is Unaisi Nabobo-Baba's 'Vanua Research Framework' (2007). This is a research approach based on indigenous Fijian local worldviews and epistemologies. I see this research contributing to more locally meaningful, appropriate and therefore, sustainable models of indigenous development.

It is vital for us to understand Boumā's environment, or indeed, any environment, as connected, contingent, relational, expressively dynamic, dialogic, embedded and embodied if we have any hope of comprehending the ways in which externally introduced development initiatives like community-based ecotourism will be locally interpreted, negotiated and enacted.

Discussion and summary

This paper has provided a small window into the *vanua* as a complex worldview and epistemology that weaves together the people, spirits and ancestors, all elements of nature, and the gods of Boumā. This is just one example of the culturally diverse ways the environment is understood and how people relate to it. Those who work within the epistemological horizon of the sustainable development paradigm need to attend more closely to the ways they categorise, treat, and refer to others' environments.

Saying this, those who study indigenous human-environment must also be careful not to reproduce what Kay Milton refers to as the 'myth of primitive ecological wisdom' (1996). As she is careful to point out in *Environmentalism and Cultural Theory: Exploring the Role of Anthropology in Environmental Discourse* (1996), many pre-industrial cultures have destroyed their environment and so one cannot argue *a priori* that pre-industrial cultures lived harmoniously with their environment. However, this does not take away from the central message here that an understanding of indigenous epistemologies may contribute to models of sustainable development that empower rather than reinforce neo-colonial attitudes through the application of unsuitable western models of science and development (Gegeo 2000, Hau'ofa 2000, Hereniko 2001, Huffer and Qalo 2004, Quanchi, 2004). Understanding indigenous epistemologies, while recognising that these are not static and timeless, assist us in deconstructing romanticised images of the idyllic and traditional subsistence lifestyles of collectivist societies (Hausler 1994) and help us avoid other erroneous assumptions of local realities, needs and wants.

Sentient ecology, the dwelling perspective, and other approaches that contribute to the ecological humanities by broadening notions of human-environment relationships, provide researchers with a deeper appreciation for the innovative ways not only indigenous communities, but all communities negotiate skills and knowledge introduced through sustainable development within their holistic, connective, and relational environments. The *vanua* as a worldview is in the process of ongoing renegotiation and re-imagination. At the time of my research, the majority of the community were clear about their desire to retain core elements of the *vanua* but were uncertain how to do this alongside new desires for 'modernisation' or as some said, 'moving with the tide'. Their answer has been to culturally hybridise the core cultural values of the *vanua* with introduced values and practices such as a cash-based economy and entrepreneurship, democratic decision-making, and (from much earlier on) governance institutions (for example, the Great Council of Chiefs and the *turaga ni 'oro*), and Christianity (hybridised as *lotu va'avanua*) (Farrelly, 2009). In

this way, they make moves to sustainably manage their forests and coasts, educate their children and ensure they have access to healthcare while maintaining their connection to land, ancestors, and each other. The struggle for the people of Boumā is to find a way for life *va'a vanua* (the *vanua* way) to retain whatever value and meaning the people derive from it today when confronted with ongoing forces of neo-colonialism.

This acknowledgement of the dynamic ways in which indigenous communities negotiate introduced skills and values relating to their human-environment relationships is just the starting point for sustainable development practitioners if they are to develop a more complex awareness of indigenous responses to sustainable development and a post-colonial approach to sustainable development. Other steps include learning how these negotiations are played out within local limitations such as social structure and current worldview, and how hybrid or new ways of approaching the environment are emerging and what this means.

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