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# ENVIRONMENTALLY INDUCED MIGRATION IN FIJI

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

The University of Utah

May 2018

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The University of Utah Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

This research is a compilation of ethnographic and ecological accounts of three rural Fijian villages that moved inland as a response to coastal erosion. Using Vunidogoloa and Vunisavisavi on Vanua Levu, and Narikoso on Ono Island, Kadavu, as case studies I show how: (1) communities are affected by the physical and discursive elements of climate change, (2) communities manage their relationship with an increasingly unpredictable and changing environment, and (3) local level actors are working with national and international actors to make environmental decisions. Beyond description and interpretation, I examine how relocation is embedded in themes of power, culture, gender, religion, agency, and political control in respect to local level social fabrics, relationship to the environment, and perceptions of environmental deterioration within Fijian communities.

As a whole, this dissertation illustrates the complexities and heterogeneity of rural people's perception and experiences with their environment, environmental changes, and adaptation measures. With the distinct case studies, I pay specific attention to the relocation process including: how the Fijian government incorporates communities into environmental decision-making processes, how bureaucratic processes interact with local level hierarchies, how vulnerable populations are disproportionately marginalized by relocation efforts, and the unintended social consequences of relocating a community.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the individuals and organizations that assisted me throughout the process of this dissertation. I would like to thank all my interviewees, especially the people of Vunidogoloa, Narikoso, and Vunisavisavi who shared with me their experience and allowed me to be part of their community during my time with them. I would also like to thank the University of the South Pacific, specifically the School of Geography, Earth Science and Environment who provided me with institutional support. I am incredibly grateful to Dr. Eberhard Weber and Dr. Per Becker who acted as my overseas mentors.

I am forever indebted to my dissertation advisers, Dr. Brett Clark and Dr. Sarita Gaytan, for their continued academic and emotional support throughout my time at the University of Utah. I would also like to acknowledge the rest of my committee, Dr. Tabitha Benney, Dr. Andrew Jorgenson, and Dr. Kim Korinek for being such an amazing crew. Thank you to Dr. Wade Cole and Dr. Marcel Paret for our informal conversations. Of course, thank you to Dr. Sing Chew who has been a solid presence since my time at Humboldt State. I should also express gratitude to my parents, brother, and sister for their continued encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank the National Science Foundation and the University of Utah Global Change and Sustainability Center for providing the funding which allowed me to undertake this research.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

In my research for this dissertation, I initially planned to answer the question: How are Fijian communities utilizing relocation as an adaptation to coastal erosion? I intended to pay particular attention to relocation as a bureaucratic and social process in respect to mechanisms of governance, repatriation for a physical loss of land, inequality, and rights to place. This approach seemed to make sense, given all my preliminary research about Fiji's government assistance with village relocations. Amid my fieldwork, my analysis became increasingly more complex than a community experiencing coastal erosion, and a government intervening to financially assist with its environmental adaptation.

The title, *Environmentally Induced Migration*, is slightly deceptive. It gives the illusion that this research is solely about the relationship between migration and the environment, oversimplifying the multiple dimensions associated with the causes, consequences, and adaptation measures of environmental change. Rather, it is more accurate to refer to this dissertation as a compilation of ethnographic and ecological accounts of three rural Fijian villages that moved inland as a response to environmental degradation. Beyond description and interpretation, my research examines power, culture, gender, religion, agency, and political control in respect to the social fabric, relationship to the environment, and perceptions of environmental deterioration within

Fijian communities.

As a whole, this dissertation illustrates the complexities and heterogeneity of rural people's perception and experiences with their environment, environmental changes, and adaptation measures. With these distinct case studies, I pay specific attention to the relocation process including: how the Fijian government incorporates communities into environmental decision-making processes, how bureaucratic processes interact with local level hierarchies, how vulnerable populations are disproportionately marginalized by relocation efforts, and the unintended social consequences of relocating a community.

I also examine how these relocation efforts are transforming social relations with the state. In order to do so, I take an approach outlined by James Ferguson in *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990), in which he discusses development projects in Lesotho. In his analysis, he assesses the ways in which "development" projects have failed, but he also draws attention to how the principles embedded in "development" reorganize bureaucratic and social structures. Similarly, I address the contentious areas regarding relocation efforts. Instead of only drawing attention to what the relocation is *not* doing, I also examine how the policy is reprioritizing the agenda of the national government, reshaping the social fabric of communities, altering the relationship between the communities and the government, and changing the ways in which people interact with their environment.

## 1.1 Media and Political Discourses

This research also debunks some of the common misconceptions associated with the relationship between environmental degradation and migration. Popular media often

sensationalizes the migration-environment relationship as one of mass migration from the developing world to the developed world. In the early 1990s, headlines were filled with warnings about an alarming influx of "climate refugees" and "environmental refugees" from developing nations and "sinking islands" (Bettini 2013; Farbotko and Lazrus 2012; Hunter, Luna, and Norton 2015). Apocalyptic images in the mass media generated a global narrative and created an image of a victim, while simultaneously perpetuating fear.

Visuals of people standing in oceans coupled with headlines of climate refugees opened up a dialogue of climate justice (Mayer 2013). Within this discourse were conversations that alluded to altruism and fear. On one end of the spectrum was a politicized debate surrounding the legal implementation of environmental refugee with two main foci: (1) what constitutes an environmental refugee and (2) is *refugee* appropriate terminology? These questions were embedded in a larger framework discussing international governance, extraterritorial rights, and responsibilities of more-developed countries to lesser-developed countries. The primary premise was that more-developed countries, as the major carbon emitters, are most responsible for global environmental degradation, and therefore have a moral obligation to assist lesser-developed countries.

On the other end of the spectrum was fear. An alarmist view perpetuated the notion that migration will pose a threat to international security by stressing already scarce resources in host countries, which will eventually result in conflict (Castles 2011; McAdam 2012). This sentiment contributed to anti-immigration fears of poor people overwhelming the social systems of the developed world, and adds to the notion that migration is intrinsically bad for receiving countries (Bettini and Andersson 2014;

Hartmann 2010).

The alarmist view was most evident in Australia and New Zealand's political rhetoric. Both nations are assumed to be destinations for populations of low-lying islands threatened with rising sea levels. Adding to the fear of a mass exodus from low-lying atolls to the South Pacific hegemons was a media rumor about a resettlement program from Tuvalu to New Zealand. Even though New Zealand's demand for cheap labor has drawn migrants from neighboring low-lying islands since the 1960s (Bedford and Hugo 2012), no such policy to accept "environmental refugees" was ever put in place (Shen and Gemenne 2011).

Constant repetition of exaggerated stories and misinformation in mass media outlets distorted the relationship between migration and the environment. Furthermore, these stories ignored general views on migration, leading to the assumption that in the wake of environmental deterioration people will choose to leave their homes (Shen and Gemenne 2011). What these media depictions failed to take into account are cultural identity and people's sense of homeland (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012). In addition, they depicted a victimization narrative. The most obvious visual of this was a patronizing view of small island nation inhabitants, assuming that island populations are incapable of managing their own lives, and need political representatives and external actors to manage their relationship with the environment.

Despite all the tensions that climate change generates in regard to inequality, this is *not* a simple depiction of selfish first world actions displacing the inhabitants of a small island nation, or an altruistic government fighting for the rights of its people. This dissertation moves beyond the victimization narrative evident in political discourses and

media representations of climate change and its effects on island nations. It does not reinforce the imagery of the islands as the "canary in the coal mine," "drowning" with "floods of climate refugees" fleeing their homes, or small island inhabitants as passive victims sitting idly while their homes get flooded. Instead, this research emphasizes that people are agents of power and exercise their power to varying degrees in relation to institutional structures (Foucault 1977). For this reason, this dissertation seeks to understand how Fijian rural villages manage their lives in an increasingly unpredictable and deteriorating environment.

## 1.2 Unequal Ecological Exchange

I do not want to dismiss the geographic and social vulnerability of Fiji. This dissertation is a clear representation of unequal ecological exchange, which is derived from the classical foundations of unequal exchange and *under*development (Hornborg 1998; Jorgenson, Austin, and Dick 2009; Rice 2009). This perspective posits uneven access to the environment based on position in the global hierarchy (Hornborg 1998; Martinez-Alier 2002; Rice 2009). It also emphasizes a clear paradox, wherein the environmental degradation concentrated in less-developed countries is caused by the resource consumption of populations of more-developed countries (Jorgenson et al. 2009). So, not only does unequal ecological exchange theory emphasize that more-developed countries assume a disproportionate amount of environmental space, but it also observes an uneven *structural* relationship whereby resources flow from the lesser-developed to more-developed countries.

A premise of this theory is related to the principle of *ecological debt*, which has

two distinct logics. First, ecological debt describes the export of undervalued raw materials from lesser-developed countries, which does not account for externalities in the form of ecological degradation (Martinez-Alier 2002). This tenet focuses on the price of nature in terms of trade. Second, it highlights that countries with more wealth and military power occupy a disproportionate amount of ecological space to the detriment of lesser-developed countries (Martinez-Alier 2002; Rice 2009). The notion of ecological debt, although problematic because of its ambiguity and attention to quantifying nature, speaks to the general unevenness of ecological degradation and development. By categorizing lesser-developed countries as creditors and more-developed countries as debtors it makes visible the fact that the development of wealthier countries "has been profoundly subsidized by and conditioned upon the appropriation and degradation of the environmental resources of LDCs [lesser-developed countries] as well as disproportionate utilization of the global commons" (Rice 2009:226). The latter of these tenets best describes the position of Fiji in an international context. Although the country is least responsible for human induced environmental changes since it contributes miniscule amounts of global carbon emissions, its geographic and social vulnerability makes the Fijian population susceptible to the impacts of climate change. In this context, wealthier countries with their carbon emissions are quite literally consuming Fiji's physical space. From this perspective, Fijian low-lying coastal communities being forced to relocate due to sea level rise and more frequent and intense storm surges is not only an ecological concern but a political one as well.

The environmental changes threatening Fiji is a manifestation of structural power relations. Julie Maldonado (2014:63), in her article on the displacement of Louisiana

tribes, goes so far as to refer to environmental degradation as a form of “tacit persecution” in which economic and political processes have generated conflict between certain populations and the environment. Thus, ecological degradation is not only an interaction between society and the natural environment, but it is a complex dynamic encompassing political, social, and economic power structures.

## 1.3 Climate Change in Fiji

The relocations of Vunidogoloa, Narikoso, and Vunisavisavi are situated in a national and international context. At the micro level are the villages, at the meso level is the national government, and at the macro level is the international discourse of climate change and structural relations between countries. Throughout my fieldwork, it was evident how different actors and bureaucracies within these scales worked with and impacted one another. These interactions were often complicated, in which the relationships were both tense and cooperative.

National government and NGO workers, as well as scholars, expressed frustration about the pervasiveness of the climate change discourse in Fiji. Interviewees spoke about climate change taking over the policy sphere in the South Pacific due to an availability of international funds for assistance with adaptation measures, whereby the region was “chasing funding.” This generated some concerns. As a scholar at University of the South Pacific pointed out,

> Most of my colleagues here are frustrated and annoyed that climate change has got so much mileage in terms of funding. It’s taking over, and replacing so much of the other work that has to do with sustainable development and issues that are empirically far more a challenge to the communities than climate change.

More pressing issues, such as education, poverty alleviation, access to health care, and

the growth of urban settlements, were being overlooked because availability of funds was dictating national priorities. Along the same vein, in 2015, an NGO worker argued that issues associated with climate change such as food security and coastal erosion were not priorities for Fiji at that specific moment in time, but they would be imminent threats to communities in the future. He further elaborated that by the time climate change was a *real* threat to the islands, the region may have overused the discourse *and* international funds. Others went so far as to suggest that Fiji's current environmental issues were a product of unsustainable development completely independent of climate change. However, this statement is contested under the principle that it is impossible to disentangle environmental from economic and political variables.

In regard to relocation, government workers and scholars were surprised by the magnitude of attention Fiji was receiving for the relocation of Vunidogoloa. On numerous occasions, I was asked, "What makes Vunidogoloa so special?" Other islands such as Tuvalu and Kiribati are more vulnerable because of their low-lying topography. Why did I not go there? Moreover, some island governments had already assisted with relocations. For example, the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea (PNG) are said to be the first "Climate Refugees." These islands have reportedly been "sinking" since the 1980s, in which the government of PNG responded by establishing a planned relocation scheme to assist the islanders' movement from the Carteret Islands to the neighboring island of Bougainville (Edwards 2013). In 1982, ten families were moved to Bougainville before returning home to the atoll because of unfamiliar terrain and conflict with the host community. Again, in 2005 the Carteret Islands received public media attention for implementing another relocation scheme (Camprubi 2016). In between this time period

(1982-2005), the PNG government in 2001 relocated the Duke of York Islands. Yet, the inhabitants of the Duke of York Islands received no media attention compared to the Carteret Islanders. The fact that the Carteret Islands received widespread attention, but the Duke of York Islands received none, parallels the primary question in regard to Vunidogoloa. What makes Vunidogoloa so special?

I pose two hypotheses to this question. First, in her book on the legal aspects of sustainable development, Alejandra Camprubi (2016) argues that varying degrees of attention may be a reflection of public concern about climate change. Vunidogoloa's recognition is thus not a product of the relocation itself, but an expression of the global community's worry about environmentally induced migration. Had PNG islanders attempted the relocation just a few years later, then scholars, journalists, and such may have flooded the islands. Second, the village relocations aligned with the government's national relocation agenda, and Fiji's encroaching political leadership of the climate change initiative in the South Pacific (Interview Exchange). In this regard, Vunidogoloa's fame is a product of an intentional government effort to draw attention to the threat climate change poses to the Fiji Islands. The village is then a mere symbolic representation of the Fiji government's attempt to portray an image of commitment to the well-being of its population in the wake of impending climate change disaster. This sentiment was also evident in Fiji's representation in regional politics.

### 1.4 Pacific Island Development Forum

Fiji has positioned itself as the leader of the small island developing states. Being the most developed and second-most populated island in the South Pacific, it is

attempting to displace the traditional hegemons of the region—Australia and New Zealand. The country is doing so by establishing its presence in the climate change discourse. This is indicative in numerous actions. The most visible occurring in 2013, when Fiji's Prime Minister, Frank Bainimarama, and his administration, created the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) (Lawson 2015). The PIDF was established as a response to Bainimarama's suspension from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 2009 when in 2006 he took over the country in a military coup and refused to reinstate a democracy following requests from South Pacific neighbors (Lawson 2015; Poling 2014). Although the 2006 coup was nonviolent, it was nonetheless an overthrow of an elected government, which gave the international community enough leverage to diplomatically sanction Fiji (Lawson 2015).

The PIDF is juxtaposed with the PIF as being distinct in that it only includes "the People of the Pacific and will reflect their values of respect, compassion, service, etc." (http://pacificidf.org/vision-2/). Although located in the South Pacific, the forum does not recognize Australia and New Zealand as Pacific people. The tension between these two forums symbolically represents the political tension between Australia and Fiji. Prime Minister Bainimarama's animosity was illustrated in his welcoming address on September 1, 2015, at the Third PIDF Summit, where he stated,

> I have a simple message today for the Australian PM, Mr. Abbott, it is time to put the welfare and survival of your Pacific Island neighbors before the expansion of your existing coal industry and your continuing reliance on this dirtiest of energy sources….
>
> It is also time for the Australian Government to stop undermining the PIDF by actively lobbying regional governments and regional leaders not to attend. I have said repeatedly that this organization is no threat to the PIF, which Australia and New Zealand prefer to maintain as the dominant, if not sole, piece of regional architecture.

> We established the PIDF as a complementary organization because we felt the voices of all Pacific Islanders weren't being heard. We wanted something more inclusive. And we definitely wanted to provide a platform for our civil society organizations—the genuine voice of the grassroots in the Pacific. And our private sectors—the principal generators of the jobs on which the welfare of our people depends. (Transcript)

This address presents a political agenda embedded in the climate change discourse of the South Pacific region with Fiji differentiating itself from Australia through its stance on climate change.

Although the PIDF has a clear political agenda with Australia and New Zealand, it is also intended to strengthen South-South cooperation. During the Third PIDF—Climate Change and Sustainable Development—Bainimarama used relocation as an example to show his commitment to Fiji's neighboring islands. In his welcoming address he stated, "Fiji has promised to give a permanent home to the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu—our closest neighbors—in the event of a worst-case scenario in which their atolls are swamped or become submerged altogether" (Transcript). Kiribati President Anote Tong responded to the verbal promise made by Bainimarama in the Fijian newspaper, describing the initiative "to offer refuge in Fiji as courageous and it has shamed the world with this commitment" (Baoa, Ranoba. "Fiji Shames World with Courage, Says Tong." *Fiji Times*, October 29, 2015). President Tong is quoted in this same article as saying, "But let Fiji take the lead and the rest can follow in time." Not only is Fiji making a commitment to assist relocation efforts on an international level by offering a sanctuary to its Pacific Island neighbors, it is making the same commitment to its people on the national level.

## 1.5 Fiji National Relocation Guidelines

During the time of my fieldwork, Fiji was in the process of creating National Relocation Guidelines for vulnerable coastal communities that were faced with possible displacement. Ambiguity circulated around the impending guidelines. One government worker maintained that the intention for the draft was formed in 2012 during the first National Climate Change Summit (NCCS), a forum that brings together the private sector, local and national government, and civil society. It was explained that villagers who were present at the NCCS expressed the need to move because of encroaching sea levels. Representatives from coastal communities took the NCCS as an opportunity to inform government workers that they were planning on moving their village because sea level rise was making their communities inhabitable. However, the primary concern of those present was *not* financial assistance. Rather they wanted to avoid any possible land issues from demarcating new village boundaries. According to the interviewee, this became the point in time in which the government chose to intervene, contending that it had a responsibility to the people.

Another national government worker maintained that the guidelines were a product of the Vunidogoloa relocation, which was discussed in 2009, three years prior to the NCCS. During this time, the Fiji government saw the need for guidelines because Vunidogoloa highlighted the inevitable nature of relocation for communities throughout the islands. Although Vunidogoloa was relocated prior to any guidelines, its outcome only reinforced the need for a structured policy dictating a formal process to follow. Despite the motivation driving Fiji's National Relocation Guidelines, the policy was expected to be finalized in January 2016.

The Climate Change Division, which was in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time, held the first relocation consultation in June 2015. They invited local NGOs, United Nations (UN) agencies, iTaukei Affairs, government councils, scholars from University of the South Pacific, and community members to participate in a two-day workshop discussing the appropriate steps to follow for relocating a village (Interview Exchange). Unlike the three case studies in this dissertation that relocated from iTaukei (indigenous Fijian) land to iTaukei land (which I further discuss in Chapter 2), the impending guidelines will address four types of possible relocations: (1) iTaukei communities on iTaukei land, (2) communities leasing iTaukei land, (3) informal settlements on state land, (4) other communities on non-iTaukei land (Development of a Relocation Guideline for Fiji 2015). The overall government goal with the National Relocation Guidelines was to address all types of Fijian communities including vulnerable informal settlements on state land, and communities that lease iTaukei land. Individuals that comprise these two groups are largely landless Fijians and Fijians of Indian descent whose ancestors were indentured servants brought to Fiji by the British to work the sugarcane fields, but were not granted land rights (Mintz 1985). As landless and most often impoverished groups, the government is taking it as their responsibility to find land to allocate to these groups.

Despite all the complexities of the relocation guidelines, there are three uncontested principles to the *Relocation Process Consultation* (2015). First, the draft of the proposed guideline outlines that there must be 100 percent consensus, coupled with proof of consensus from 90 percent of the community. This percentage excludes nonresident villagers, which are villagers not living in the village. Second, the request for government assistance *must* come from the community. In regard to this second premise, a readily

available platform will be created so the communities are able to find the proper paperwork to submit a proposal for government assistance. Lastly, relocation will only be implemented when all other options have been exhausted. These uncontested principles are meant to ensure that the community remains in control of decisions that affect their lives (Interview Exchange). In addition, they are meant to align with what has become the Fiji government slogan, “Relocation is the last option.”

A vulnerability and adaptation assessment accompanies the guidelines. This component was described as symbolic, illustrating the proactive nature of the Fiji government (Interview Exchange). The vulnerability assessment is the job of the Conservation Officer, which was a newly appointed position, whose title is held in each Provincial Office (local government). The Conservation Officer’s primary responsibility was described as hiring a team to assess the social and climatic threats of every Fijian village in their respective province, regardless of if they requested relocation assistance (Interview Exchange). In addition, the Climate Change Division was sending in the Ministry of Land and Mineral Resources to document natural resources that may be available on village land, especially endemic hardwoods, such as Fijian mahogany and vesi. The rationale being to identify resources that can be mined or logged for revenue and used to financially assist with possible relocations (Interview Exchange). Similar to the vulnerability and adaptation assessment, the Ministry of Land and Mineral Resources planned on documenting all natural resources within village boundaries, whether or not the community solicits assistance for relocation.

In this dissertation, I draw attention to a number of characteristics in the Vunidogoloa, Narikoso, and Vunisavisavi relocations that align with and do not align

with the tenets of the proposed National Relocation Guidelines. Some of the principles deviating from the guidelines are highly contentious in that they are described as the "uncontested principles," raising valid concerns about the guidelines themselves. On the one hand, a formal policy would ensure a standardized process. On the other hand, if relocations are implemented with a disregard for the most basic of principles, should a policy be put in place? Because once a policy is in place, it becomes a viable option.

## 1.6 Methodology

This dissertation draws on my fieldwork in Fiji from August 2015 to April 2016. Researching under an NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement grant and Global Change and Sustainability Center grant at the University of Utah, I lived for nine months in the Fiji Islands. I spent the majority of my time in the capital, Suva, conducting interviews with government and NGO workers, members of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), religious preachers, and scholars at University of the South Pacific. I attended climate change conferences directed at local, national, and international audiences. I listened to visiting scholars and graduate students at University of the South Pacific, who presented their research on climate change. Most of this scholarship included the more pertinent themes to the South Pacific such as the role traditional knowledge can have in advancing adaptation efforts, the need to educate rural villagers about climate change, and the threat environmental degradation poses to the culture of small island developing nations. I went to art exhibits, poetry readings, and cultural performances to see how artists were conveying messages about environmental degradation through creative mediums. I gathered information from various

environmental government policies. I perused the Suva library and University of the South Pacific's archives to gather any information discussing environmental concerns in the South Pacific. I also read the newspaper almost daily, taking specific note of the articles on climate change. All of this gave me a baseline understanding of the overall climate change discourse in Fiji. By better understanding the general narrative, I established greater insight into the political, social, and economic implications of the relocation policy.

Luckily at the time of my fieldwork, Fiji was preparing to send delegates to negotiations for Conference of Parties 21 in Paris in which they were acting as the spokesperson for the small islands. The Paris agreement was critical in that Prime Minister Bainimarama was taking the lead in advocating for the Loss and Damage article, which would compensate all developing nations for adverse effects brought on by climate change (UNFCC 2014). Although vague, the article implies repatriations to lesser-developed countries for damage to infrastructure caused by more severe storm surges, and losses which entail a complete disappearance of a species, habitat, or, in the case of small islands, land (UNFCC 2014).

Because of the timely nature of my visit, the topic of "climate change" was dominating the newspapers, policy sphere, and television. There was an abundance of material to look through along with plenty of well-informed people immersed in current environmental politics, and eager to discuss the upcoming Conference of Parties 21 meeting along with the role Fiji was taking in it. This gave me an advantage in that I could situate the national level climate change discourse in an international context. I was thus able to pose questions directed at the macro level, including: What role is Fiji taking

within the international discourse on climate change? What is the national climate change agenda that is being disseminated to the international community? I could then compare and contrast the macro level to the micro level in order to answer the question: Is the national government reflecting the interest and concerns of its people when it comes to climate change policy?

My time in Suva gave me insights into the national and international agenda on climate change in general, and relocation specifically. My time in the communities gave me the opportunity to analyze these two themes on the local level. When I was not in Suva I was in Fijian rural villages. Approximately a month and a half of my total time in Fiji was divided between three villages—Vunidogoloa and Vunisavisavi, both on the island of Vanua Levu, and Narikoso on Ono Island in the Kadavu group. All of these villages relocated, were in the process of relocating, or were planning for relocation as an adaptation to coastal erosion.

I anticipated spending a month in the communities, which was seen as excessive. Often, when I spoke to scholars at University of the South Pacific who did research in Fijian villages, they spent three days or upwards of a week in respective communities. The rationale being that villages are small and it does not take long to conduct interviews or hand out surveys. Moreover, people often told me, “You are not an anthropologist,” implying that *fieldwork* is a methodology unique to anthropology. However, I opted to stay for a month in Vunidogoloa, because I wanted to do participant observation. I found it important to understand the local level hierarchy and social fabric in the village. So, I attended village meetings taking note of which people were in charge of which community committees. I spent time visiting people’s farms, fishing, doing daily chores,

going to church on Sundays, and eating meals or drinking tea with the households. In addition, since villages are predominantly Methodist or Catholic, they recognize Sunday as a day of rest, which meant that I would not be conducting any interviews on Sundays. Consequently, I would automatically lose a day of work.

My time varied in the villages with my longest stay in Vunidogoloa, the largest community of the three, with a modest thirty-two households. It was also my primary reason for conducting research in Fiji. An initial intention of spending two months in Vunidogoloa ended up being slightly less than one month for a couple of reasons. First, after a few weeks my interviews became redundant, signifying that I had reached a point of saturation. Second, my presence started to feel like a nuisance with Fijian attention to hospitality, proving to be stressful for the host family and interfering with people's daily activities. I left earlier than anticipated and went to Vunisavisavi.

From Vunidogoloa, local government workers assisted me in arranging an impromptu visit to Vunisavisavi. I had not planned on visiting this community, nor was I aware of the partial relocation until I started conducting interviews in Fiji. I decided to add it as a case study since it was only an hour and a half away from Vunidogoloa, and local government workers insisted that I go. Impromptu planning restricted my fieldwork to only two days in Vunisavisavi. This gave me plenty of time to speak to the four households that were being moved further inland. But it was not enough time to fully grasp the complexity of the community's unique position in regard to its environmental and cultural concerns which I further touch upon in Chapters 6 and 7.

Upon return from Vunisavisavi, I spent a month back in Suva. Reflection regarding my fieldwork allowed me to modify my questions before I went to the third village,

Narikoso. During this time, I was able to reinterview some people for clarity on inconsistencies that arose regarding the relocation of Vunidogoloa. More importantly, my visit to the villages altered interviewee's demeanor towards me. Since I was able to speak to particular characteristics that were at times deemed "controversial," external stakeholders seemed more willing to offer insight into the process and outcome of Vunidogoloa's relocation. I further touch on some of these methodological particularities in Chapters 2 and 4.

Finally, in November 2015, I went to Narikoso. It was critical that I conducted my fieldwork before December. Since religion is a central component to indigenous Fijians lives, Christmas is an important holiday with festivities in the villages usually lasting the month of December and two weeks into the New Year. Minimal work is done during this time. Rather, people are hosting family and friends from Suva or other villages, visiting other islands, socializing, or preparing gifts and food. I knew that if I went during December, people would be preoccupied, and it would be more difficult to arrange interviews with households. Similar to my intentions with Vunidogoloa, I planned on spending three weeks in Narikoso since it was only twenty-seven households. Again, I shortened my stay to two weeks because I assumed the relocation was further along making many of my questions regarding the process not fitting. In addition, more questions than answers arose after this visit, which required further clarification that I could only get back in Suva. Luckily, I had a sufficient amount of time to follow up on some of these concerns.

The role of language in this dissertation is important to recognize. English, Fijian, and Fiji Hindi are national languages of the country, with English being the dominant

language of education and government. I had thus anticipated being able to rely on English for my interviews since I do not speak Fijian. Conducting interviews in English was not a problem in the urban areas. Everyone I encountered in Suva spoke English. I quickly came to realize the ability of people to speak English in Fiji is not universal, but there is a deep urban-rural divide in regard to language.

Unlike urban areas, Fijian is the primary language in rural communities. After years in the villages, most people, even the youth, claimed that their English was "rusty" since they rarely spoke it. Villagers were thus reluctant to converse in English, saying that they were embarrassed about their limited conversational skills. There is also a generational trend associated with language. Since compulsory education was not initiated into law until 1997 (UNESCO 2011), a substantial number of people above the age of 40 in rural areas speak minimal, if any, English. In order to avoid any language barriers, I consequently used an interpreter throughout my time in Fijian villages.

I initially planned on bringing an interpreter in case I needed assistance with translation. I knew there was a chance people in the rural areas were only fluent in their native tongue, but I was unaware to what degree this was prevalent. I started my interviews by asking people what language they felt more comfortable with. Some said Fijian, but others said English. I quickly realized that people were claiming to be fluent in English, but the interview process was elucidating a language barrier with either misinterpretations or an inability of interviewees to articulate emotions and thoughts into English. It was later explained to me that since English is the primary language of education, not speaking English implies that people are *uneducated*. In this sense embarrassment resulted in people saying they had a greater command over the English

language than they really had. Interestingly, there is also a stigma against Fijians who do not speak Fijian. On numerous occasions, I came across people who would throw insults by saying, "They can't even speak Fijian." This was used as a means to demean other's "Fijian-ness." Because of the deep social dimensions surrounding language, I opted to conduct the remainder of my interviews in Fijian, regardless of if I knew the person's language capabilities. For the most part, interviewees spoke solely in Fijian, with some switching back and forth between English and Fijian. Consequently, I conducted interviews with "stakeholders" in English and "villagers" in Fijian, so a considerable number of direct quotes in this dissertation are from government workers, scholars, and NGO workers while villager's responses were translated with some exceptions of Fijian youth.

The area of translation and my relationship with my interpreters also deserves special attention. I used two different interpreters, one for Vunidogoloa and Vunisavisavi and another one for Narikoso. Beyond being fluent in Fijian and English, both were women between 25-30 years of age, and both had some college education. It was important for me to have a female companion for a number of reasons. First, I wanted a female interpreter who would not just translate, but could also teach me about culturally appropriate female behavior in the village. I elaborate on this topic in Chapter 3. However, it is important to note that women, as well as men, are expected to adhere to specific rules of conduct in the village including what to wear and how to behave. A female translator, thus, had more insight into female specific rules of conduct. Second, platonic male-female relationships are less common in the rural areas, so I wanted a female companion so as not to entice gossip. Third, I was concerned that I would run the

risk of a male companion making women feel uncomfortable if their husbands were not present. Specifically, I worried that a male interpreter would not be allowed in a woman's house if her husband was not home. Coinciding with the last point, another woman would allow me to infiltrate all women-occupied spaces. The presence of a man would interfere with a gendered dynamic. This is complex in that my position as an American woman and therefore my interpreter's position granted us the privileges of men. Thus, our presence was less likely to disrupt all-male gatherings. However, I was unsure if a man would solicit the same response in all women-occupied spaces due to a socially gendered power dynamic. In other words, I assumed my interpreter and I could navigate both male and female spheres, but I was concerned that a male would be confined to the male sphere.

In addition to considering gender, it was important that I had a translator who was not from the respective villages. On numerous occasions, Provincial Officers directed me towards youth of the village who were fluent in English. Primarily because the economic opportunity of acting as a research assistant would be beneficial to them. It would also be economically advantageous for me in that I would not have to pay for another person's transportation cost. However, it was imperative for me to have a fellow "outsider."

The insider/outsider debate is prolific in qualitative methodological research design. It poses the fundamental question: Should the researcher be a member of the population they wish to study, or not (Dwyer and Buckle 2009)? There are some benefits to being a member of the population being studied, the most obvious being "tuned-in" to the values, beliefs, and perspectives of the group (Chavez 2008; Dwyer and Buckle 2009). While the ability to identify with the interviewees can be advantageous, it can also inhibit

objectivity (Chavez 2008; Dwyer and Buckle 2009). It is often argued that by being "too close," researchers are more at risk of viewing the studied population with "rose-colored glasses" (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). In contrast, outsiders are given the benefit of the doubt with maintaining neutrality (Mullings 1999). Moreover, being outside of the population can be an advantage when gathering information because it is less likely to interfere with issues concerning confidentiality (Mullings 1999). For the most part, the insider/outsider debate has become stagnant under the presumption that identities are fluid rather than fixed, so the insider/outsider binary is more complex than initially discussed. Despite any advantages of being from the community, I preferred an outsider because in such close-knit communities, I did not want people to feel inhibited in sharing information with a fellow community member.

I also wanted to minimize the limitations with translation that I was already facing by using an interpreter who was less invested in community affairs. One major drawback to using an interpreter is that I am dependent on another person to be truthful with their translation. In this dynamic, the interpreter holds most of the power in what they choose to share and not share. This raised a major concern for me, if I chose a person from the community, I was worried that they may not be forthright with what others were saying. I was not apprehensive about deceit per se, but rather omissions altogether.

This also raises the issue of interpretation. By having a translator, I give up some interpretive control. Since not all Fijian words directly translate to English, the interpreter holds power over the narrative in how they choose to convey what the interviewee is saying. This ranges from the words that they choose to how they describe social arrangements. This can have grave implications for the analysis in that the interviewees'

narratives are subject to two rounds of interpretation—the translator's and then mine. Since this dissertation is an interpretive analysis of people's narratives about their experience with relocation efforts, it is important to briefly discuss my stance as a researcher.

## 1.7 Interpretation

Narratives serve as part of our everyday communication. They are the stories we share with others providing a glimpse into our goals, values, perceptions, and the ways in which we understand society (Shenhav 2015). Through narratives we are able to understand people's reflections of reality (Shenhav 2015). For research, they serve to identify patterns from people's experiences and actions in order to make sense of a series of events (Vindola-Padros and Johnson 2014).

Yet, the challenge with interpreting other people's narratives is objectivity. I interpret people's narratives to the best of my ability. This takes into consideration that stories serve purposes. They are truthful, they relay sequences of events, but they are also used to persuade, justify, construct a conception/identity, or mislead (Shenhav 2015). Adding to the complexity of narration is the role of the person telling the story. Goffman (1981) identifies three forms of storytellers and the relationships they have with their story. There is the animator (who presents the words), author (who composes the words), and principal (whose position is expressed). In addition to hearing the narrative, it is important to recognize who the speaker is because all of these factors pose challenges to "accuracy."

At the same time, it is naïve to assume complete impartiality of my interpretation.

Instead, my positionality shapes the way in which I interpret the data. I have control over the analysis so, by default, there are biases. As Shaul Shenhav (2015:73) states in his book on interpreting narratives, "An analysis of the relationship between story and reality can never be free from value judgments, standpoints, or outcomes." This excerpt illustrates the built-in biases of researchers based on their gender, sexuality, age, nationality, and/or ethnic identity. For example, my interpretation of time and sequential events reflected an inherent bias. Throughout the dissertation, I draw attention to inconsistencies with sequence of events. My personal perception of time as a linear trajectory led me to draw conclusions of dishonesty. While linear chronologies give the impression of credibility, linearity is not a universal perception of time (Shenhav 2015). Time can also take on a circulatory form, especially in oral traditions where written records are scarce. This was not an immediate observation on my part. With time, I came to learn that inconsistencies do not translate to dishonesty. At the same time, there were general trends that emerged with differing narratives that coincided with the interviewee's sex, status, and role in the relocation. I further examine this in Chapter 3, when discussing the gendered dimensions of the Vunidogoloa relocation.

This also raises considerations about how others perceived me, and how this may have altered what people chose to disclose. I navigated a complex position that speaks to the fluidity of the abovementioned insider/outsider debate. As a formally educated white woman from the United States, I was given certain privileges, which I discuss throughout the dissertation. Villagers were also skeptical of me, assuming at times that I was with the government.

The above attention to biases illustrates the subjectivity of interpretive methods.

Doing so makes my research vulnerable to methodological criticisms in that it does not align with the rhetorical power of "objective," "rigorous," and "generalizable." Yet, as a compilation of narratives, this research is valuable in that it reflects the social realities of those involved in the relocation. It is thus important to conclude this section with a disclaimer. This document is not a forum to speak on behalf of individuals, or intended to appropriate the social realities of those who shared their personal experiences with the relocation. It is meant to make sense of a series of events.

## 1.8 Layout

The analyses that follow address the fundamental question: How are those directly threatened with coastal erosion managing and implementing relocation as an adaptation? From this question, I extract themes concerning agency and structure, culture, gender, power, religion, environmental degradation, and government roles. I evaluate these themes with descriptive and interpretive analyses attempting to find coherence in the political subtleties of relocation at the local level in a national and international context (Salzinger 2005). Throughout this dissertation, I weave in narratives of how people feel/felt about relocating, including their concerns, anticipations, and excitement. Rather than outline this element specifically, I incorporate people's narratives concerning relocation within the various themes of the sections.

Due to the heterogeneity of the villages, processes, and actors involved, I chose to organize this dissertation as case studies rather than themes. The subsequent chapters are thus ethnographic accounts of the three villages. Similar to Leslie Salzinger's (2005:29) ethnography on gender and production in Mexico, "These narratives do not take the form

of structured comparisons of a consistent set of 'explanatory variables.'" Rather, the distinctions across the chapters should be approached as individual case studies.

Part of the variation in the relocation processes and outcomes is attributed to the diversity of actors involved. In the case of Fiji, every village has a traditional hierarchy with a Chief and Turaga Ni Koro (village headman). The person who holds these roles can shape the way the village functions. Moreover, villages are comprised of individuals who work within structures to varying degrees. For example, villagers' experiences, perceptions, and roles *within* communities vary based on their gender and social standing in the village. In conjunction with the social fabric of the village, there are the external actors who have varying degrees to which they were involved in relocation efforts. For example, the government took an active role in Narikoso and Vunidogoloa's adaptation efforts, while United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Coastal Community Adaptation Project (C-CAP) were the dominant stakeholders assisting Vunisavisavi. Both the internal and external actors led to divergent processes and outcomes.

While the above variables contribute to dissimilarities between case studies, it is important to recognize the heterogeneity of the villages themselves. Scholars continue to perpetuate an urban-rural binary implying exclusive homogenous categories (Andersson et al. 2009). Along with this is an idealistic imagery often portraying rural spaces as "unspoilt landscapes sheltering pristine communities; other time—and again, more often—as backward areas providing towns and cities with raw material and manpower" (Andersson et al. 2009:2). Although scholars have debunked the misconceptions of rural *people*, the notion of homogeneity of rural *locale* is slower to change. It is continuously

being emphasized that flows of people, information, and access to opportunity has created diversification amongst the "countryside" illustrating that rural communities do not conform to one single model of living (Andersson et al. 2009). Similarly, this is the case of Fijian villages. While all three villages are in Fiji, the migration patterns of community members, geographic remoteness, demographics, access to economic opportunity, and natural resources contribute to a diversified rurality. This can make generalizations difficult to ascertain, but there are some commonalities between the case studies that will be discussed in the conclusion.

Since this dissertation is organized into case studies, each chapter is devoted to a specific village. I begin by discussing the environmental changes and the relocation of each village in a broad context, followed by an additional chapter that addresses a component unique to the relocation of that village. Yet, each particularity is aligned with a broader social problem in Fiji.

The chapters are as follows:

Chapter 2 examines the relocation of Vunidogoloa on the island of Vanua Levu in a broad context. This is the only village in this dissertation that had fully relocated. For this reason, there are elements that cannot be addressed in the other two case studies—specifically, the social changes that emerged *after* relocating the village. In addition, Vunidogoloa is the largest village with a modest thirty-two households. It is a predominantly Methodist community and was often described by local government officers as more "traditional" relative to Narikoso and Vunisavisavi.

Chapter 3 pays specific attention to gender relations in regard to the decision to relocate Vundogoloa. While gender inequality was prevalent in the Narikoso case study,

to a certain degree, it was most visible in Vunidogoloa. In addition, this aspect of the relocation coincides with the broader issue of gender inequality throughout the Fiji Islands with national campaigns attempting to bring awareness to women's rights on the local level.

Chapter 4 focuses on the village of Narikoso on Ono Island in the Kadavu archipelago. It is by far the most remote of the three communities. Unlike the other two case studies, this village was still trying to secure funding for the relocation. The stage at which the relocation process was in at the time of my visit generated distinctions that were unique to this village.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the religious explanations for coastal degradation in Narikoso. Unlike the other two communities in this dissertation, Narikoso villagers interpreted the causes of the rising tides according to the religious doctrine of Noah's Ark, creating unique challenges for the relocation initiative.

Chapter 6 is devoted to Vunisavisavi on the island of Vanua Levu. Vunisavisavi differs in that it is technically a settlement, which I further discuss in this chapter. It is also worth noting that local government officials described it as "less traditional" because of its youthful demographic. Also differentiating it is that it was not a government assisted campaign. Therefore, it had a unique set of organizing principles.

In Chapter 7, I discuss Vunisavisavi's unique history to the Fiji Islands. The importance of Vunisavisavi as a historical site elucidates a larger concern in the South Pacific of cultural losses associated with the impacts of climate change.

To conclude this dissertation, I discuss the comparisons across the case studies while also paying attention to the differences. I then analyze the relocations in a more

general context by revisiting the question: How are the relocations reorganizing bureaucratic structures?

# CHAPTER 2

# VUNIDOGOLOA

## 2.1 Vunidogoloa, the City at Night

"There's a saying that goes, 'Vunidogoloa, the city at night' because of the lights. The solar lights make the place look like a city."

–Assistant Roko Tui (government worker)

In 2009, Vunidogoloa on the island of Vanua Levu was identified as the first Fijian community to be relocated because of coastal erosion, more intense flooding from the Nabua Vusetakala River, and more frequent storm surges. Discussion and planning amongst the community and the government, regarding the location of the new site and how to raise money for the project, persisted for the next few years. In 2012, fundraising for the relocation and collaborations between the village and different Ministries—including the Ministry of Provincial Development, the National Disaster Management Office, and the Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing & Environment—began. In 2013, construction of the houses at the relocated site started. Finally, on February 16, 2014, the Prime Minister of Fiji, Voreqe Bainimarama, held a publicized grand opening ceremony for Vunidogoloa.

Vunidogoloa became famous overnight. This small village of 140 residents was virtually unknown to people outside of Cakaudrove Province. Within two years, most

people in Fiji would have heard about Vunidogoloa. Fijian newspapers and alternative news sources reported on the climate change program with headlines reading "Villagers Relocated" (*Fiji Times* July 2, 2015), "World Hears of Fijian Villages Relocations" (*Fiji Sun* December 7, 2015), and "Vunidogoloa Relocation Praised" (Taleitaki, Siteri. *Fiji Sun* January 7, 2014)—all referencing the successful outcome of the relocation. The village headman, Sailosi Ramatu, who acts as the liaison between the community and the government, became the poster child for climate change in Fiji. He would eventually be invited to the Conference of Parties 23 in Bonn, Germany, to advocate for the plight of small island states. School children and college students would take fieldtrips to Vunidogoloa over the next two years to witness the devastation climate change has on small island coastal communities. Almost two years later, Prime Minister Bainimarama would travel to Paris for the United Nations Climate Change Conference and tell delegates from all over the world how Vunidogoloa was forced to move because of the actions of industrialized nations including the United States, Australia, and European countries, or what he called "The Coalition of the Selfish." The village would be used in Bainimarama's address to the international community as a rationalization for the "Loss and Damage" article in the Paris Agreement 2016.

After the relocation, representatives from national and international NGOs began visiting the original site to see firsthand the devastating impacts of coastal erosion. Scholars and policy workers from Alaska and Louisiana went to Fiji to see how this community managed relocation, and learn what lessons could be applied for coastal communities that may need to relocate in the United States. United Nations workers, humanitarian organizations, and church groups would journey to Vunidogoloa to ask

what else the village needed to complete their project.

The government was praised by local and international press for taking a stance on the impacts of climate change. Their noble actions were publicized throughout the islands' primary news source, its newspapers. The *Fiji Sun* (Tuwere, Josua. "Climate Change is Everyone's Business." June 25, 2015) reported on the proactive nature of the government with Vunidogoloa and climate change in general, stating, "The Bainimarama Government to its credit has not allowed itself to be an idle spectator to the problems of climate change. Our Prime Minister is walking the walk." *The Fiji Times* (Silaitoga, Serafina. "Villagers to Move into New Homes." January 15, 2014) commended the government for Vunidogoloa and the 879 thousand Fiji dollars relocation project, which included 30 houses, a copra drier, pineapple farm, cattle, and fish ponds, which were intended to be used to generate income for the village. In numerous articles, the Turaga Ni Koro expressed gratitude to the government, "We have been relieved by the Government's help and we are very grateful for their support for the people of Vunidogoloa" (Waqasaqa, Seruwaia. "Saved from Being Swamped by Sea." *Fiji Sun,* January 17, 2014). In another article he was quoted, "We want the Prime Minister of the day to be present, as all the credit goes to him and all the government departments because they made it happen" (Taleitaki, Siteri. "Vunidogoloa Relocation Praised." *Fiji Sun,* January 7, 2014).

Newspapers, conference presentations, and government documents about Vunidogoloa perpetuated the depiction of a successful relocation program. It was a win-win for the community and the stakeholders involved. While people were reportedly upset over leaving their village "where they had lived all their lives and moving to a new

environment they were not really familiar with" (Moceituba, Atasa. "Villagers Relocated." *Fiji Times,* July 2, 2015), they were relieved to relocate away from the sea, which posed dangerous living conditions. Throughout interviews with villagers, people described sleeping soundly without having to worry about a flood occurring in the middle of the night. In addition, their standard of living was raised through income generating projects, which were part of the relocation plan. The *Fiji Times* (Moceituba, Atasa. "Villagers Relocated." July 2, 2015) reported that through the implementation of the pineapple farm and copra drier, the villagers were able to start their own business to financially assist individual households. Each family received a new home, equipped with solar lights, and a flush toilet. School children were no longer missing school because of flooding. More importantly, they were able to get to school safely on the bus instead of making the long journey on the *bilibili* (bamboo raft). Furthermore, Fiji was setting an example for other countries in the South Pacific, and the world in general. The government executed a nuanced adaptation to climate change, and highlighted a government's responsibility to its people.

In this chapter, I present the relocation story of Vunidogoloa village. Using ethnographic data collected from my fieldwork, I explore the relocation of Vunidogoloa. How was the decision to relocate made? How did the community interact with the government throughout the process? How have different community members been impacted by the move since the relocation took place? Lastly, how can the relocation of Vunidogoloa inform future relocations?

Despite being one of the first communities in Fiji to be relocated, Vunidogoloa was presented as a bottom-up environmental decision. According to some interviewees I

spoke with, there was never any resistance from community members to relocate. Stories about Vunidogoloa emphasized that the Turaga Ni Koro and other elders in the village formally approached the Provincial Office asking them for financial assistance with the relocation because they believed there were no other options. Village leaders then requested the Provincial Officers to visit Vunidogoloa, so they could see the environmental degradation firsthand. A conversation with the Provincial Administrator at the time revealed, "[Relocation] was an act of necessity for the village." Those involved in the decision to relocate, the community and stakeholders, believed this was the last viable option. They believed a seawall would be a temporary solution, while relocation considered the future. In other words, relocating ensured that grandchildren and great grandchildren of Vunidogoloa would have a place to call home.

After multiple government visits in 2009, the community gathered to pray and hold meetings about whether they would relocate. The villagers collectively fasted and repented for their sins as part of a traditional reconciliation ceremony to heal the people and the land. For Vunidogoloa in particular, it was culturally important for the community to collectively reconcile their relationship with the old site before they made the decision to relocate. By mending their relationship with the land, they were also mending their bond with each other, God, and their ancestors. This practice is indicative of a strong cultural link in Fiji between land and heritage.

The most nationally and globally recognized story of community reconciliation is the village of Navatusila of Navosa on Viti Levu. The Fijian village made global news in 2003 when the people of the region gathered and invited descendants of Reverend Thomas Baker, a missionary who was cannibalized by the Fijians in 1867, for a

traditional reconciliation ceremony (Ryle 2010). The villagers were apologizing on behalf of their ancestors because they believed the cannibalization of Baker (a white missionary) contributed to a curse in their village, which manifested itself in social and environmental ills including “problematic relations with local government, lack of development, social problems, infertile land and bad harvests” (Ryle 2010:71). As Jacqueline Ryle (2010:69) further emphasizes in her study on land and religion in Fiji,

> Polluted or disordered relations between people are also a polluting of the land. Disordered social relations and disordered relations to the land can effectuate *kalouca* (lit. evil spirit), sickness and death in a clan, in subsequent generations too, until the customary ritual of reconciliation has been performed and accepted. A healing of relations between people therefore involved healing the land.

The author’s above quote identifies the Fijian connection between social organization and nature. The reconciliation process illustrates the deviation from a more often nature-society binary. Contrary to this dichotomy, Fijian culture focuses on an interconnectedness of the two, which is emphasized in the story about the cannibalization of Thomas Baker, whereby the sins of the Navatusila peoples’ ancestors led to social and environmental problems for their descendants.

The link between land and people is also linguistically represented in the Fijian term *vanua. Vanua* is all encompassing, it roughly translates to land, soil, people, ancestors, and country, but it also describes a concept (Ryle 2012; Tomlinson 2002). It is a relationship people have to their land. Fijian culture emphasizes that land connects the people of the present to their ancestral roots because ancestors are buried in the soil (Tomlinson 2002). When Fijian land is damaged, it is indicative of a fractured social relationship. Through reconciliation with God, villagers are able to restore equilibrium between the physical and cosmological world (Ryle 2012). This ensures restoration of the

land, and blessings for the community. For Vunidogoloa villagers, by engaging in fasting and prayer, the community believed that they could move to the new site with good tidings.

The relocation was portrayed by the media, government officials, and village leaders as cohesive and simple. Villagers felt that relocation was the last viable adaptation to the environmental degradation they were experiencing. Provincial Officers agreed with the villagers' assessment, so they assisted with the finances and bureaucratic process of demarcating new village boundaries. Considering the depiction of the relocation, I anticipated that I would write about a rural community that was being negatively impacted by climate change. I assumed that this study would be about a community, and a whole country, whose existence is being threatened by the actions of "The Coalition of the Selfish." As a result, I would focus on injustice, and a government acting altruistically to help fight climate change while simultaneously increasing the standard of living for its people. Instead, after conducting my research, I came back with a more complex story, one that still involved climate change along with broader social problems of gender and income inequality, situated within a national political agenda.

## 2.2 Bula, Bula, Bullshit

"Remember, it's bula, only one bula. If you say bula, bula,
we say bula, bula, bullshit."
—Advice from a local man in Nadi

After approximately five hours on the ferry from Suva, in September 2015, I arrived in Vanua Levu in the small tourist town of Savusavu, Fiji's "Hidden Paradise." It

is a small bustling town filled with symbols of wealth including yachts, resorts, and signs advertising diving and snorkeling tours through the coral reefs. Outside, restaurants and bars are filled with tourists drinking local beer and enjoying their leisure time while the locals gather their village provisions before the last bus of the day leaves for the countryside.

At four in the afternoon the buses make the final trip for the day through Cakaudrove Province. People, primarily locals, rush and crowd together at the bus stop to take the long dusty ride back to their home. Villagers fill the buses with necessities including kilos of sugar and flour for cooking, liters of cooking oil, bars of soap for washing, mosquito coils, and petrol for the generators. Fijians of Indian descent sell dried peas, mango skin, and sugary juice to those patiently waiting for the bus to leave. The buses are blasting Justin Bieber and reggae covers of classics like Prince's "Purple Rain," perhaps to drown out the sound of the engines. Exhaust from idling buses combined with the humidity adds a layer of sticky film to everyone's skin. Then suddenly out of nowhere, honking fills the stand as all the buses attempt to leave at once and warn the pedestrians to get out of their way. Within twenty minutes the bus stand goes from noisy and crowded to silent and empty.

I wander around the stand, amid peak hour, looking for the local Provincial Officers whom I am supposed to meet for the first time at the bus stop. A Fijian man suddenly comes up to me and asks, "Amanda?" I reply, "Yes, how did you know it was me?" He says, "I was looking for one *kaivalagi* (foreigner)." I stood out, since not many kaivalagis ride the bus. He immediately helps me with my bags, and watches them while I buy some kava root for the *sevusevu* and the *itatau*. The sevusevu is an offering to the village Chief,

who I ask for permission to enter the village, and the itatau is the offering I give upon leaving the village, when the Chief sends me off with blessings. I come back and sit with the *Assistant Roko Tui* (local level government official), whom I just met, while he tells me that the *Turaga Ni Koro* (village headman) is in town stocking up on provisions and then will take me to Vunidogoloa. We wait for about twenty minutes, and the conversation is interrupted by uncontrollable laughter. A thin, happy-looking man in a *sulu* (traditional skirt worn by men and women in Fiji), brightly colored bula shirt (a common casual shirt with masi or floral design), and sunglasses greets me with a vigorous handshake and multiple *bulas* (hellos).

I was introduced to the *Turani* (informal term for Turaga Ni Koro serves as a title and name), and listened to the men engage in a lively conversation in Fijian. I was later informed that the Provincial Office warned Turani that he was responsible for my well-being and if anything happened to me, he would be in "big trouble." Turani took his role as guardian seriously, and throughout my stay in the village I was not allowed to go anywhere unaccompanied.

The Assistant Roko finally left, and I was alone with Turani. We started to share stories about Vanua Levu and life in Suva. He asked me how I liked my stay in Fiji, and he told me about his tasks as the village headman. His source of pride came from the fact that the community elected him. He held the role of Turani for the last eleven years, and was a pivotal actor in the relocation of the village. The village continued to reelect him, despite the fact that he wanted to retire soon. His long duration as Turaga Ni Koro was twofold: He was a good leader and no one else in the village wanted the responsibility associated with the role. The Turani acts as the liaison between the community and the

government. An Assistant Roko in the Provincial Office described the role of the Turaga Ni Koro as, “They’re there to help us. They are our eyes in the village. If the village wants anything they bring it to us, and we direct it to the government.”

The Turaga Ni Koro is one of the most important roles in the village. A Provincial Officer argued that the village will only do as well as its leadership. As a former Roko maintained, there are three types of village headman: the proactive leader, the good listener, and the lazy one. As they explained, if the Turani is lazy, the community suffers because village issues and concerns are never brought up with the government. If the Turani is proactive, the community will flourish, with assistance from government with development projects and climate change adaptation projects. If the Turani is a good listener, the community remains relatively stable, neither struggling, nor receiving government assistance. People described the Turani of Vunidogoloa as a proactive leader. Provincial Officers joked about the Provincial Office in Savusavu proclaiming, “This is Turani’s office. He’s always here.” His leadership was described as persistent, and according to some the village of Vunidogoloa was chosen to relocate because of his determination and meticulous record keeping.

The Chief of the village holds an equal amount of power as the Turaga Ni Koro. While the Turani is elected, the role of Chief is ascribed at birth. It is often contested as to who has more power in the village, the Turaga Ni Koro or the Chief. This shift in power is indicative of government reform, which some argue diminishes the power of the traditional hierarchy. In the past, the Chief made all the decisions for the village. If the village received money for resources or leasing land, the Chief would receive the majority of the profit, while the village divided the remainder. In recent years, the

government has reformed the traditional hierarchy in an attempt to make it more egalitarian. As a result, all profits must be evenly distributed amongst the village, and 60 percent of the village has to agree regarding all major land and development decisions. For example, a Chief can no longer make the sole decision to lease *mataqali land* (land owned by a Fijian clan) without approval from 60 percent of the *mataqali* (Fijian clan, collection of landowning family). The motive behind these reforms is disputed, some argue this is an attempt to make the village more equal. Others see this as an attempt to redistribute decision-making power, and take it away from the Chief, but give it to the government through the Turaga Ni Koro. In this context, some government workers maintain the Turani acts as the local level government official in the village. Despite these reforms, obedience is a characteristic of Fijian villages. While people are not legally obligated to side with the Chief and Turaga Ni Koro, people will not deviate away from leadership because they fear social repercussions. More traditional villages will dismiss these reforms altogether, and make decisions based solely on the Chief. Others may hold a meeting and take a vote, but again tradition serves as a coercion mechanism for people to vote in a way that appeases the leaders.

Turani and I sat waiting for a taxi to the village since the last bus of the day had already left. A forty-five-minute taxi ride to the village cost 23 U.S. dollars, which is expensive by local standards, but considered reasonable for most foreigners. Turani pulled out a mobile phone, made a call, and within ten minutes a 1970s looking lime green Cadillac with leopard print interior pulled up. The driver told us that we would leave in a few minutes, so Turani ran off to do a few more errands. After fifteen minutes, we were finally on our way to Vunidogoloa.

For the first fifteen minutes of the taxi ride, we passed private villas and high-end resorts that dotted the coastline. These spaces are primarily occupied by Australian and European tourists. The further northeast we drove, away from town, the more remote and desolate the countryside becomes. Resorts were soon replaced with rural Fijian villages. Each village was demarcated with a sign that stated its name. Some villages were slightly inland, while others have the ocean lapping at the doorsteps. They vary in size from ten to fifty or more houses. The houses themselves are made with different materials such as tin, wood, or concrete. Just driving by, I could see that some houses are one open room, while others have two or three rooms. Fiji has an open-door policy, as long as a person is home and awake, the doors to the house are always open. None of the houses have windows, but openings in the walls, or slatted glass shutters. Both the size and the material of the house are indicators of wealth of the individual household. Wooden and concrete houses indicate the household has more resources than people living in a tin structure. Indoor plumbing, a television, a flush toilet, and a generator are other status symbols that highlight rural stratification.

Although there is economic inequality within the villages, the starkest disparity of wealth exists between the locals and tourists. This is evident throughout all of Fiji, but even more so in tourist towns, including Savusavu. In general, the country is heavily reliant on tourism for the local and national economy. In the 1960s, the government prioritized tourism as a means to diversify the economy, which has been reliant on sugarcane exports since the British colonized Fiji (Pratt, McCabe, and Movono 2016). Since the 1980s, tourism has been the largest income generating activity in Fiji, constituting approximately 20 percent of the nation’s GDP (Harrison and Prasad 2013). It

is the primary contributor to the national GDP, overtaking the sugarcane industry, but also one of the more energy intensive sectors. Most resorts offer air conditioning, swimming pools, and hot water for their guests (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014), but only 76 percent of the Fijian population has access to electricity (World Bank 2012).

While tourism is essential to the small island nation's economy, it is also symbolic. It epitomizes a racial dichotomy that mirrors global racial stratification. Elites from imperialistic countries, like Australia and England, are able to enjoy the luxuries of former colonies, but the citizens of these nations are often excluded from these spaces. In his study of tourism in developing nations, Brian King (2001:175) argues that resort towns in particular,

> Symbolizes the economic dualism of LDCs…. For critics, resorts exemplify stark disparities between Western elites, able to enjoy leisure and conspicuous consumption in exotic locations, and the local workforce, which must behave with neocolonial servility towards white guests in compound-like settings from which they would otherwise be excluded.

Extreme economic inequality exists between host communities and international tourists. What is more, the haves and have-nots in *regard* to wealth and access to luxuries also involves racialized *otherness*, especially when considering the workforce. In Fiji, most villages and settlements are strictly Fijian with some Fijians of Indian descent who lease land from the mataqali (land owning unit). Yet, most resorts are filled with European, Australian, and North American guests. Through hotels and resorts, foreign guests are able to afford first world conveniences in a developing country. These spaces also serve as hubs of conspicuous consumption with flashy jewelry, resort wear, luxury cars, and large carbon footprints (King 2001). The dichotomy of the Fijian workforce and white guests serves as an uncomfortable reminder of a racial hierarchy established by the

British. Foreign guests are able to walk around resorts and visit nicer places in bikinis and swimming gear with flip-flops. Fijian guests in resorts are expected to look like they "belong" with nice clothes and shoes, or else they are turned away assumed to be there to haggle guests. This was not unique to these spaces, but was prevalent all around the islands. Foreigners in Fiji often spoke about personal experiences in everyday interactions where they were treated better than the locals. For example, Fijians are often asked to check their bags by storeowners, or they are checked upon leaving stores. If a worker has the audacity to ask a foreign guest to check their bag, the shop owner or manager immediately reprimands them. A Swedish expat living in Fiji expressed his frustration about this and proclaimed that when he walked into a store he would say, "Here take my bag," which the worker always refused.

Tourism in Fiji is closely linked to climate change policies. The dominant climate discourse in Fiji describes the adverse effects climate change will have on the island's tourism industry, which is extremely climate sensitive. Tourists find pleasure in outdoor recreational activities, but coral bleaching, shoreline erosion, and more frequent cyclones all threaten the economic development of the country. Conferences including the Pacific Island Development Forum and the National Climate Change Summit have panels on how climate change affects rural people. Yet, most climate change discourse is overshadowed by environmental threats to the small island developing states' economies, specifically the tourist industry, and the need for sustainable growth in these realms.

Overall, Fiji lacks the financial and technical capacity to implement climate change projects, but diving and other high-end resorts have resources and expertise at their disposal to build expensive sea walls and structures that can withstand cyclones and

storms. Furthermore, the Fijian government provides tax incentives to the tourist industry as a way to attract foreign investors, which exacerbates the concentration of wealth in high-end resorts and hotels, and deepens inequality between the local and foreign population (Scheyvens and Russell 2012). In contrast, most people who live in Fijian villages are relatively poor and rely on the government for adaptation measures. The outcome results in growing intraregional inequality alongside an unevenly developed countryside.

Incentivizing the tourist industry signifies the national agenda to prioritize foreign investment, while making the needs of the local population secondary. This is particularly revealing in Savusavu, where high-end resorts are surrounded by seawalls, but villages have subpar adaptation measures. The countryside is replete with water tanks, farms along the roadside, and a few cyclone houses with signs indicating the funder of the project, usually an international organization, such as European Union (EU), The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), or United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In-country coordinators argue that adaptation measures are limited because of the lack of funding made available to rural villages. For example, the European Union may donate 1 million Euros for climate change adaptation, but that money is often dispersed amongst a dozen villages (Interview Exchange). A lack of funding, coupled with a trend of implementing only certain projects, often leads to a decoupling of what the community needs and what is given. For example, most water tanks in the countryside are empty because they are placed in drought prone areas. The above example reflects a seemingly paradoxical trend—the wants of foreign investors are met by the national government, but the needs of the local population are met by the

international community.

It is unrealistic to expect the government of Fiji to put a halt to tourism incentives because it is critical to the national and local economy. For small island developing states, tourism provides opportunities for local employment (Pratt, McCabe, and Movono 2016). Although not guaranteed, it has the ability to positively impact local communities. Villages close to resorts and tourist towns are able to take advantage of the wage labor provided by the hospitality sector by managing hotels and working as servers, cleaners, and receptionists. The ability to engage in wage labor increases material well-being, but does not necessarily lead to an overall higher quality of life (Pratt, McCabe, and Movono 2016). Furthermore, many resorts lease mataqali land, which enables villages to accumulate wealth. Although this is communally owned land, deals still require external intervention. The independent agency, *iTaukei Land Trust Board* (TLTB), is responsible for negotiating all land leases between villages and developers. The TLTB sets a price for the land, establishes regulations for the developer to follow, and requires all resorts to provide employment to the mataqali (Scheyvens and Russell 2012). They also take approximately 20 percent of all land leases for administration fees (Asian Development Bank 2015).

Due to the conditions implemented by the TLTB leases, most of the resorts employ locals. Approximately 14.5 percent of all Fijians work in hotels and resorts (Scheyvens and Russell 2012). For rural people, specifically, the hospitality industry is a way to engage in wage labor since earning an income in the rural villages is limited. Villages closer to resorts and Savusavu are able to take advantage of employment opportunities provided by the tourist industry. However, Vunidogoloa is more remote, approximately

an hour away from the closest resort, so they are unable to work in tourism. Distance, in conjunction with buses that only go to the village twice a day, limits people's mobility. Furthermore, the price of petrol averages 6.50 Fiji dollars a gallon, so most households cannot afford automobiles. As a result, more remote communities tend to be spatially bound and engage solely in farming and fishing as a way to make a living.

To generate income, Vunidogoloa villagers primarily rely on sales of *dalo* (taro), copra, and fish to the neighboring villages or to the resort town of Savusavu. Most of these goods produced are for daily local consumption, but any surplus is sold or exchanged. *Yaqona* (kava), also consumed in the villages, which can take anywhere from two to five years to harvest, is another main source of income for households on the island of Vanua Levu. It takes at least a couple of years to harvest, but a kilo can be sold for 30-40 Fiji dollars. While the men farm and collect copra, women generate extra income by making household goods for sale, including weaving mats from pandanus leaves and making *sasa brooms* (Fijian household broom) from coconut leaves. The women's crafts do not earn a substantial amount of money, but act as a means to make extra household cash.

The family of *bone doctors* of Vunidogoloa is able to generate an additional income with their healing practices. In general, it is visible that the men and women of this family are more financially well off than other households in the village. Visitors from all over the islands and Australia travel to Vunidogoloa for the family of doctors, who have the ability to mend broken bones through massage (Interview Exchange). The bone doctor patriarch told stories of wealthy patients sending private planes for him to Savusavu, because they were too hurt to travel to Vunidogoloa. While they will travel to heal

people, patients will usually stay in the village with the family until they are healed. Technically the family cannot formally exchange money for their services, because their healing power is perceived as a gift from God and the ancestral spirits. It is believed that *blessed individuals* will be punished, and their gift will be taken away if they charge for their services (Interview Exchange). However, it is an unspoken rule that patients bring a *donation* of whatever they can give in the form of necessities such as soap, oil, and sugar; still, most people give money.

After about an hour, our car turns into what looks like a housing subdivision. Unlike other Fijian villages, Vunidogoloa is uniform. The houses are the same size, color, and material. Ironically, the sign that demarcates the village is different than most other villages. Rather than just the village name, the sign reads:

VUNIDOGOLOA CLIMATE CHANGE RELOCATION
PROJECT
A joint project by the
Ministry of Provincial Development & National Disaster Management
And the
Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing & Environment
Building Resilient Communities

Upon initial arrival, Vunidogoloa was not what I expected. Internet photos and stories omitted some contentious aspects of the village, including the spatial organization of the village and the unfinished projects. Even the basic layout of the village deviated from a traditional village setting that usually centers around the church as the focal point of the village. The houses were not scattered, but built in three crooked-straight lines making it difficult to see the neighbors' front door, which is often typical of a traditional village. The houses were organized according to *tokatoka* (family unit) instead of Chiefly units. Usually, when you enter a village, you know exactly where the Chief lives. They

have the largest house located at the top of the village to signify the importance of their status. The rest of the village is below the Chief's home, because the community is supposed to look up to their leader (Interview Exchange). However, Vunidogoloa had the Chief at the bottom towards the entrance of the village, and the church, which was a modest tin structure, was at the top of the hill. I was later informed that this layout was due to political motivation in that the uniformity of the village was intended to make it look like a government project.

While the community had been living in the new site for approximately two years, it seemed unfinished. The houses are approximately one twenty-foot by sixteen-foot room, some of which are partitioned by curtains for privacy. Each house is fit with a toilet and shower separate from the main house. According to the villagers, their houses were initially supposed to be built with a kitchen. After a year of waiting for the government to return and finish the project, the individual households took the initiative to build their own kitchens out of tin. Unable to run electricity through the village, the households rely on firewood energy, a kerosene stove top for cooking, and three solar lights per house. Unfinished drainage piping and cement blocks are scattered around the village. Unlike other villages, there is no footpath to indicate where to walk. To the far left of the houses was a partially finished structure that is supposed to serve as the village community hall. Next to that is the communal pineapple farm. At the foot of the houses are four fishponds, two of which had been drained two weeks prior to my arrival, and stayed empty for the duration of my stay. At the top of the village is a bald hill with a bluff at the base.

When the cab turned into Vunidogoloa, people came out of their houses to see the

kaivalagi who would stay with them for the next three weeks. It was slightly awkward, but expected, because rural villages are more isolated and do not have too many visitors. Vunidogoloa was a recent exception to this because of the notoriety it received for the relocation. Although people were used to visitors, the villagers were still curious, as was I. At one point, when I arrived Turani asked me if I noticed that the children did not cry when they saw me. He emphasized that this was because they have seen white people before. His comment illustrated the remoteness of rural villages along with the recent popularity of Vunidogoloa.

When the cab parked, some of the men in the village assisted me in carrying my belongings to Turani's house, which is where I stayed during the duration of my time in Vunidogoloa. The Chief, along with other village leaders were waiting at the house to perform the *sevusevu*, a traditional ceremony where visitors request permission into a Fijian village. However, permission for foreigners is often granted prior to the sevusevu from the Provincial Office. The government established a bureaucratic permission seeking process that government workers describe as a safety mechanism. Provincial Officers maintain that overseeing who enters and exits the villages keeps foreigners and villagers safe from physical harm and financial exploitation. Yet, the sevusevu serves as the traditional ceremony where the Chief has the authority to grant or decline entrance by foreign visitors to the village. While bureaucratic permission is necessary, the Chief must also grant permission. The sevusevu is really where I was given permission to essentially be a member of the community. This gave me the freedom to walk around the village and talk to people. The only condition was that I respect the village rules. These included no yelling within the village boundaries, no alcohol in the village, no shoes in the houses,

and nothing on my head including hats or sunglasses because the head is considered the most sacred part of the body. I also had to abide by the female dress code while I was in village boundaries, so I always wore my *sulu* (skirt) that went past my knees, and kept my shoulders covered.

By the time I arrived in Vunidogoloa, the villagers were used to visitors. At times people talked about being tired of always having to perform the duty of host, and to repeat the story of the village. Some responses even came across as scripted. Despite this, people were kind, welcoming, and willing to be interviewed. Most people wanted to know how I heard about Vunidogoloa. They were extremely humbled by the fact that someone would come from the United States to visit their "famous little village." As one older gentleman said, "I can't believe you came from the other side of the world, and you're sitting in my house." Despite the exhaustion from visitors, people were still hospitable because, as I was told, "It is just the Fijian way."

### 2.3 Walk Like a Fijian

"How do you like Fiji?" "Fiji is beautiful." "*Vinaka* (thank you), *Vinaka* (thank you)." "How do you like Fijian food?" "I love it." "*Vinaka, vinaka.*" "How do you like Fijian people?" "They're very nice people." "*Vinaka, vinaka.*"

–Conversation about Fiji

The insular geography of Fiji gives the illusion that islanders are spatially bound (Christensen and Mertz 2010). On the contrary, Fijians are mobile people with complex migration patterns. International migration, as well as movement between islands, rural and rural areas, and rural and urban areas, is common. Furthermore, Andreas Christensen

and Ole Mertz (2010:282) argue that mobility in the South Pacific "for all kinds of purposes driven by both social and economic causes, and mobility as a means of transport across waters to and from other islands and main lands is 'just' part of life." However, these movements are multidimensional, temporary, contingent on social networks, and motivated by the desire to pursue a certain quality of life.

At some point, most Fijians will move to a new community either on a different island, or in close proximity to their village for various reasons. Tradition, economic, and noneconomic push-pull factors drive migration flows. Traditional marital expectations require women to move from the village in which they were born to the village of their new husband. Labor schemes draw islanders to Australia and New Zealand for seasonal farm work, such as apple picking. A lack of opportunity in rural areas pushes people towards urban areas for access to schools, hospitals, and employment. At the same time, people are drawn back to the village because of preference for a rural life (Interview Exchange).

Rural-urban and rural-rural migration is a central characteristic of Fijian life. However, the growth of urban centers in the 1960s and '70s catapulted the "rural-urban drift" (Chapman 1991:265). A vast amount of literature saw this as problematic, creating an image of a mass exodus from rural villages to urban centers. Murray Chapman (1991) points out that the imagery of a "drift" overshadowed already existing migration patterns. While rapid urbanization in the '60s and '70s did occur, it did not lead to an abandonment of the countryside. Rather, it added to the complexity of already existing mobility patterns. This multifaceted nature of migration in Fiji is depicted through Vunidogoloa villager's accounts of their personal movements.

During interviews, young villagers talked about the village as a “fall back.” One young woman stated that people only move back to the village “if they can’t make it in Suva.” The youth described the urban life as glamorous and cultured. According to most youth in the village, the younger generation would opt to live in the urban areas unless they found it difficult maintaining a job or finding an affordable place to live in town. Youth who once lived in Suva expressed a longing for the clubs, dancing, and social life towns offered. However, they also noted that village life was easier because everything was “free” in the village. In the village, people live a predominantly sustenance life, so they do not need to pay for water, food, or rent.

Rural Fijian communities operate largely outside of a market-based economy. While money is essential for even the poorest of the poor, Fijian villages are predominantly centered around sustenance and communal living (Friedmann 1992; Toren 1999). Rarely is there electricity in villages. Individuals bear full responsibility for building their own homes. All basic necessities, including food and water, come from the land. Women fish, while men farm and gather coconuts, papayas, breadfruit, and bananas. Although households are responsible for their family, village life functions within a *moral economy* (Friedmann 1992). Many people prefer the village lifestyle and working within the *moral economy* versus the *market economy.*

In his research on alternative development through empowering the household, John Friedmann (1992) identifies moral economies as critical to small peasants and the urban poor. He defines it as an economy dictated by social relations based on reciprocal exchange among kin, neighbors, and friends (Friedmann 1992:17). He provides a broad framework for reciprocity, identifying it as an economic structure. Fijian communities

work within a moral economy, but it is defined not as an economic structure as much as a cultural way of life. As kin in the village, people are required to abide by norms of reciprocity dictated by the *kerekere* (please) system. *Kerekere* is a traditional exchange system where individuals make requests of their kin. According to Rita Anne McNamara, Ara Norenzayan, and Joseph Henrich (2016:2) it "fits hand-in-glove with the ideal of community ownership, as it is a great shame to have to make a *kerekere* request outside of the family and to reject a *kerekere* request from a person who is genuinely in need." The social fabric of the *kerekere* system keeps the village communal. They point out that villagers do not have to fulfill a request. At the same time, the person who does not fulfill the *kerekere* request risks any future request being turned down (Farrelly and Vudiniabola 2013). This parallels Karl Polanyi's (1944:46-47) analysis of tribal societies that operate outside of the market economy, but relies primarily on two rules of behavior: reciprocity and redistribution. Social obligations and fear of social sanctioning are strong enough to keep people from violating obligatory codes of conduct. At the same time, this way of life, Polanyi argues, requires people to put their economic interest second to the well-being of the community.

Government officials criticize the *kerekere* system of exchange as a contradiction to the logic of Western style capital accumulation. The *kerekere/*market economy is dichotomized as a traditional/modern and noncapitalist/capitalist binary (Farrelly and Vudiniabola 2013). Some categorize *kerekere* as a form or begging, arguing that it perpetuates dependency and inhibits economic development (Farrelly and Vudiniabola 2013; McNamara and Heinrich 2016). Because of the perceived negativity of the *kerekere* system, government workers will often go into villages and encourage people to

charge money for fish, meat, property, and/or services. This was also prevalent in Vunidogoloa, in which the government gave the village 4 fishponds and 6 cattle, as part of the relocation, but villagers were told to charge for the fish and meat. The Turani expressed that he was given strict instructions *not* to give any meat away, regardless if people asked. The goal was to move people away from the traditional system of exchange into a market based economy, embodying a shift from a *traditional* to *modern* livelihood.

Despite the government's push to move people towards a market based economy, many indigenous Fijian villages still practice the *kerekere* system. Moreover, villagers were prideful of the communal exchange in the village. As one interviewee stated, "In communities like this we take care of each other." Villagers often contrasted the communal lifestyle to the perceived individualism of life in the United States (Toren 1999). This dichotomy was expressed with a specific question villagers would continuously ask me, "At home can you ask your neighbor for sugar?" This question was framed in a particular context, which sought to differentiate the "Fijian way of life" opposed to the "Western way of life." When I replied, "Of course you can." People were shocked because the assumption is that individuals will face scrutiny for attempting to solicit assistance from their neighbors. This is counter to the *kerekere* system that advocates and promotes collectivity, reciprocity, and assistance amongst individuals in communities.

People in the village did not just speak about the "Fijian way of life," but they practiced it on a daily basis. Throughout my stay in the village, families took turns to assist households that had lost their primary breadwinner. They brought food to the elders who were physically unable to farm or fish. When a household slaughtered a cow or wild

pig, they would distribute the meat to every family. If walking by a house during mealtime, it is customary for the household to share food, and usher you in saying, "*Kana* (eat), *kana* (eat)." On the contrary, this same social fabric does not exist in the urban areas in Fiji. Towns including Suva have adopted a more Western style of living. This is not to say that acts of kindness do not exist in the urban areas, but the act of assisting neighbors is not an obligation; it is often an act of goodwill.

The above description enticed people to stay or move back to the villages. For the majority of the villagers in Vunidogoloa, migration is an intrinsic part of their personal history. Very few people lived in the village for the duration of their entire life. A myriad of reasons brought people to the village. Patrilineal customs required women, upon marriage, to move to their husbands' village of Vunidogoloa. Contrary to tradition, some men moved to their wives' village of Vunidogoloa, because the old site's proximity to the sea provided them with a source of revenue. Other villagers reported moving from Suva to Vunidogoloa to care for their elders. As one gentleman responded, his father moved the family back when he was a teen so they could "experience the Fijian way of life." Most elders said they returned to the village from Suva, highlighting a *preference* for the quiet and slow-paced quality of life. A couple of the younger men and their families were enticed back to Vunidogoloa upon hearing the village was relocating, saying they were promised a house at the new site if they assisted with the building. Rather than leave after the houses were built, they stayed to enter the lucrative kava farming business, with the intention of saving money to move back to Suva. For many people in the village, they preferred the rural lifestyle relative to the urban areas. Village life surpasses a regional preference. People are not always confined to the rural areas because they are

impoverished, but they see it as a *way of life*. In other words, rural life is to city life as the Fijian way is to the Western way.

All of this illustrates some of the reasons as to why people chose to settle in Vunidogoloa. For some, it was driven by opportunity, for others by preference. Despite mobility, the island from which people descended is imperative to Fijian identity formation. The importance of place is revealed when people introduce themselves, in which they usually say their name followed by their island. For example, “Bula, I’m Rusila from Bau.” Rusila may have lived in Suva her whole life, but Bau will always be part of her identity. Furthermore, being from Bau (the Chiefly Island of Fiji) will dictate how others treat her. If people lose their village because of coastal erosion, it quite literally translates to an identity crisis.

Not only individuals, but most villages will also have a story about their ancestral movements due to tribal warfare, environmental degradation, or access to education, churches, or communication. Fijians have always been nomadic, but colonial mechanisms enforced laws and boundaries, restricting people’s mobility. Although I have illustrated how movement is still part of South Pacific culture, it is qualitatively different than precolonial times. Fluid boundaries of the precolonial period allowed villages the opportunity to move as a whole. Comparatively, contemporary mobility means that households will often move as individuals.

## 2.4 What If?

"It [the sea] scared me. I never lived by the sea. My village was up in the mountains."

–Interview with village woman

As a village, Vunidogoloa is no exception to the historical trend of mobility. The relocated site is their third site as a village, and according to the elders, relocation because of more frequent storm surges was actually suggested by their ancestors fifty years prior to the government-led relocation. It was never implemented because people dismissed it as "talk." However, the village started to be more proactive about relocating in 2010 after category 4 Cyclone Tomas left them underwater.

Cyclone Tomas was the most intense tropical storm to hit Fiji since Cyclone Bebe in 1972 (McNamara and Prasad 2014). It devastated the Northern and Eastern Divisions of Fiji, Vanua Levu, and Lau, damaging infrastructure, destroying crops, and resulting in dozens, possibly hundreds, of deaths. Vunidogoloa villagers recalled the storm, which acted as a stimulus for relocation. An elderly man described the severity of Tomas, in which the water from the rivers that ran through the village met with the sea, backing up and submerging the village underwater. People recalled floating on the *bilibili* just to get to their neighbors' houses.

Tomas did not result in any casualties, primarily because The Disaster Management Committee (DISMAC), a government office, is in place to assist rural villages with evacuation and disaster preparedness. During Tomas, DISMAC evacuated the village to Nabua Primary where they stayed for a week. While there were no casualties, villagers reported economic losses in the form of damaged belongings, livestock, and boats. One woman recalled her *bure* (traditional Fijian structure made of wood and straw) being

destroyed by the flood forcing her to move into another family's house. She and her family stayed with the neighbors for two months while her bure was under construction. After a week at Nabua Primary, when the floodwaters retreated and the village dried, Vunidogoloa was left physically smaller.

While the original village is experiencing coastal erosion, the Nabua and Vusetakala Rivers have also transformed the natural landscape of Vunidogoloa. Villagers described the rising tides as happening gradually. People could not point to an exact time period to when the tides became problematic. Some described the tides as, "bad to worse," others said it became noticeable after Cyclone Tomas. Elders proclaimed it was the 1960s, but some maintained that their parents were commiserating about the changing sea in the 1950s. The miscellaneous answers about environmental transformations are not unique to this village. While there may be variation in people's perception, oral traditions still provide a more comprehensive picture of environmental deterioration when there is a lack of written records available (Jacka 2009).

However, the transformation of the rivers was described as more immediate and visible to the community. Initially, villagers described the rivers that ran through the village as creeks. They were small and slow, but more frequent and intense cyclone rains flooded the rivers. In Vunidogoloa, the rains of Cyclones Bebe and Tomas flooded the Nabua and Vusetakala Rivers causing riverbank erosion. The transformations of the riverbanks physically altered the landscape creating less space for people to rebuild their houses, so families who were displaced because their homes were destroyed were permanently displaced.

For some, Hurricane Tomas served as a reminder of Cyclone Bebe. Most people,

except for a few elders, did not witness, or were too young, to recall the devastation caused by the 1972 tropical storm. There were only two elders who remembered the story of Bebe. According to one elderly man, the 1972 storm also left the village underwater within minutes. Unlike Tomas, Bebe killed a couple of elders and youth in Vunidogoloa. After Bebe, the village men built a seawall out of boulders and crushed up coral, but throughout the years it became dilapidated and did not serve as an adequate barrier to the more intense storm surges. Finally, when Tomas demolished the seawall is when people were more proactive about moving.

Tomas reminded people that nature is a powerful force that can cause damage and death. Every household spoke about being "lucky" that the village did not flood in the middle of the night while they were sleeping. When recalling the storm, households always mentioned a "what if" scenario. What if the next flood happens during the night when people are asleep? Will there be casualties?

Because of the previous floods, some villagers perceived relocation as a precautionary measure. Villagers often thought why wait for something to make it a reactionary adaptation. For example, an eighty-two-year-old elderly man was a proponent for the relocation because of his experience during Cyclone Bebe. He spoke about feeling sad about leaving his home. It took a few months for him to acclimate to the new site, but in Fijian he said, "I didn't want to die at the old site because I knew that could be a possibility if we stayed. I wanted to move over what I witnessed before." Others saw the relocation not as an option, but a necessity. One woman spoke about not wanting to move, but being *forced* to because of what was happening in the village. Others, mostly women, worried about their children being so close to the sea. Ironically, the Turani and

others pointed out, “This is not the first time we were forced to move because of water.”

## 2.5 They Brought the Light

“The first flood occurred during the Dark Ages.”

–Interview with an elderly man

During a *talanoa* (story) session, the elders recalled the story of their forefathers in relation to relocation. It was the 1800s before the missionaries came from England. They lived in the mountains, up in the clouds, where people now hunt for boar and farm their land. There still lies the stumps indicating the foundation of their ancestors’ homes. During this time, most Fijian villages were strategically placed on mountaintops to protect themselves from warring tribes. This allowed the village to see their enemies and gave them a defensive advantage. Throughout all of Oceania, this period is considered the “Dark Ages” by Fijians, when Fijians were eating other Fijians, and people were worshipping false gods (Tomlinson 2004). It was an “evil time” when Chiefs would make *lovo* (traditional way of cooking by heating up rocks) of their enemies because it was believed to give them power and strength. At that time Fijians were the most feared people of all the islands. They had a reputation around the world of being fierce warriors and “heathens” for their cannibalistic tendencies (Tomlinson 2004).

In the 1830s, Christian missionaries from England began to arrive. Elders speak about the arrival of the missionaries positively, maintaining that they “brought the light,” Christianity, and the word of God. This historical transition signified a new era of Christian enlightenment, and is spoken about literally from a time of “Darkness” to “Light” (Tomlinson 2004).

Most Fijians express gratitude towards the missionaries for saving their forefathers from evil and their taboo pagan history. The Europeans converted the Fijians to Christians and set up schools and churches. They are praised for putting an end to tribal warfare. According to the elders, the missionaries brought most villages out of the mountains. People started to settle by the sea, and sought flat land because they no longer needed to protect themselves from tribal warfare. Also, newly converted Fijians wanted to be closer to the churches and schools set up by the missionaries. However, their village moved from the mountains for very different reasons.

Vunidogoloa's mobility is slightly different. Environmentally induced mobility is a story deeply embedded in their roots. Their ancestors, unlike other Fijians, did not move because of the missionaries, rather a massive flood displaced the former village from the mountain and split it into four smaller villages. According to an elder, Vunidogoloa, neighboring Bucalevu, Vuninadi, and Nabua all lived in the mountains together. After the flood, they split apart for reasons unknown. Those who settled in Vunidogoloa, on the coast of Natewa Bay, wanted to be close to the sea so they could communicate by sending messages to the High Chief who was living on the neighboring island of Taveuni. The sea also provided an abundant amount of resources including food and transportation around and between the islands. For the next hundred years, the sea would continue to provide people with food, a means of transportation, and economic resources. Yet, the same environment that provided staples to the community would eventually be the same environment that posed an imminent threat to the villagers.

The origin story of Vunidogoloa is set in a precolonial period when mobility was not restricted. All Fijian land was owned according to customary law, which was

ambiguous, informal, and fluid (France 1968). Tribes were nomadic, settling where they could cultivate land until they chose to leave, were displaced by another tribe, or faced with environmental degradation (Walter 1978). Land was informally gifted and exchanged by Chiefs, who were the only ones allowed to authorize land exchange. While Gerard Ward (1995) points out that precolonial land tenure structures are impossible to understand given the oral nature of Fiji's history, he notes that records of the 1877 Council of Chief's meeting indicates that land cannot be completely alienated. Contradicting this statement is the fact that Chiefs were known to sell off Fijian land (Ward 1995). Although precolonial land tenure structures are ambiguous, it is worth pointing out that traditional land boundaries were constantly influx, often dictated by military strength of tribes (Ward 1995).

The arrival of the Europeans introduced the concept of fixed boundaries. When the British colonized Fiji, Europeans flocked to the islands to buy land from Chiefs for large-scale cotton plantations and future development projects (Ward 1969; Ward 1995). The informal dealings Fijians practiced did not suffice for the Europeans, resulting in land disputes between Chiefs and foreigners. In 1876, Sir Arthur Gordon, Fiji's overseer, put a halt to all land sales. He established a registered land tenure system, which sought to reclaim all fraudulent land dealings made between the Chiefs and Europeans (Ward 1969). His intention was to keep the islands' customs intact, so he gathered with the Chiefs to learn how traditional land tenure worked. However, land ownership in Fiji was a diverse customary structure based on oral agreements. There were no rigid boundaries or formal documents proving alienation of land, so the colonizers created one. Gordon required that all land be surveyed and registered demarcating clear boundaries. The

policy that ensued was a quasi-traditional land tenure structure stemming from his meeting with the Chiefs, but largely influenced by Western notions of private property rights. With establishment of the colonial institution, Land Claims Commission, Gordon converted land tenure to a formal system of "ownership" (France 1968). All Fijian land fell under one of three categories, *iTaukei* (owned by indigenous Fijians), Crown (owned by the British government), or freehold (privately owned) (France 1968).

Sir Arthur Gordon implemented the concept of mataqali/iTaukei land. With the implementation of mataqali land, people became spatially bound. All mataqali land was to be communally owned throughout the generations, born and unborn. By creating a rigid land tenure system that considered the future generations, it was supposed to ensure that mataqali land could never be alienated (Toren 1999). This land tenure system is not communal in the traditional sense, whereby it is public, but it is owned by multiple *tokatoka* (family units) that comprise a mataqali. Even the term "ownership" in this context is used for the lack of a better word, but is in need of clarification. The iTaukei land tenure structure ensured that land would be an indigenous Fijian birthright. Because of this it saw people as temporary *users* of the land (Toren 1999). However, the colonizers and Chiefs reserved mataqali land claims solely for indigenous Fijians, excluding indentured servants who were brought by the British from India to work the sugarcane fields (Mintz 1986).

There are numerous contemporary consequences to the Land Claims Commission. First, it altered traditional land tenure structures to a system of ownership. Second, it protected iTaukei land from foreign acquisition. Third, it excluded approximately half of Fiji's current population, which is of Indian descent, who can legally only lease mataqali

land or purchase freehold land. Lastly, the Commission transformed traditional mobility patterns. By fixing and registering land claims, villages are no longer able to move between settlements without infringing on another mataqali's claim, having to purchase freehold land, or illegally settle crown land.

Although Fiji became a sovereign nation in 1970, British institutional structures remain intact. The colonial system of land tenure created by the Commission was exacerbated in 1940, with the creation of the iTaukei Land Trust Board (TLTB) whose "initial purpose was to secure, protect and manage land ownership rights assigned to the iTaukei landowners and to facilitate the commercial transactions that revolve around its use" (https://www.tltb.com.fj). Established during colonization, the TLTB continues to control all leases for iTaukei landowners. It has stayed consistent with its initial mission of "act[ing] as the agent of each landowning unit in all legal dealings involving native land—the issues of leases, agricultural licenses, timber concessions, and the subdivision of land for land, settlement and other developmental schemes as well as for residential purposes" (Nayacakalou 1971:208). Some residents of Fiji have a favorable impression of the TLTB, but it is also criticized as a paternalistic mechanism established during colonial times that limits the ability of villages to execute full agency over their rightful land claims (Interview Exchange). The TLTB forces villages into a bureaucratic process by requiring landowners to seek external intervention for all leases, and pay a required 20 percent fee.

Colonial mechanisms have complicated contemporary land tenure systems, providing challenges and opportunities for relocation. Prior to colonization, the concept of land ownership was foreign to Fijians (Ward 1969). People were nomadic, able to

move without restriction or government intervention. In some respect this mentality still exists. A researcher at University of the South Pacific observed, “The idea of land and ownership is cliché. A lot of the people involved don’t see the world in the same way,” continuing, “this notion of defined villages is relatively recent. I think there are people who still feel that we want to live where we want to live.” This is evident throughout Fiji with informal leasing arrangements that bypass the TLTB, and the fee that the TLTB charges.

While colonization has restricted mobility, and forced people into a bureaucratic process that manages iTaukei land claims, the land tenure structure in Fiji has generated a unique set of advantages for villages that need to relocate. Unlike other countries that abide by private property rights for individuals, iTaukei communities already have land. Since land is communally owned, most communities are able to move within their customary boundaries. This raises the question, if communities are moving to their own land, why is there government intervention?

## 2.6 The Government Has No Face

“When you say government, what are you talking about?” Followed by a blank stare.

–Discussion about the government

The relationship between villages and the Fijian government is ambiguous. The national government assists with village development, but villages are traditionally independent of government control. They follow the laws of the nation, but are autonomous entities, following their own traditional hierarchy, creating their own rules of conduct within village boundaries, and managing their own affairs. With regard to

relocation, iTaukei communities are anticipated to move within their own customary boundaries. In addition, villages are traditionally autonomous and people are relocating to their own land. Because of this, there is confusion as to what role the government should take in respect to relocation efforts.

Villagers unanimously maintained that the government has an obligatory role in assisting communities with relocation efforts. They argued that if a community has financial and/or natural resources to relocate they should utilize them. However, if the community is unable to contribute any finances or land, the government should provide 100 percent of the funding and resources. This rationale is embedded in the perceived obligation the government has to its people. As one villager explained, “All issues concerning the community have been taken up with the government through the Provincial Office.” He continued, “In communities like this, when taking up matters to the government it is like this, we have to have a village meeting. The Turaga Ni Koro will [take notes during the meeting], take [them] up with the Provincial Office, and they will see each note. It will be taken to the various government departments. All the issues of all the villagers.” For the villagers of Vunidogoloa, relocation was not a distinguishing issue that required government intervention. It was just one of many village concerns that followed protocol.

The role of the government in relocation efforts was an area of contention. As one interviewee from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, a development organization for the region, stated, “There’s confusion with the role of the government in Fiji. People don’t exactly know what the government does.” This confusion was expressed throughout interviews, wherein government workers would continuously point to the

government as the culprit of wrongdoings or the responsible actor. Absent from the analysis was a cohesive response as to what the roles and the responsibilities of government are in terms of the relocation. Moreover, local and national level government workers blamed the government for contentious outcomes, but did not acknowledge their position as being part of the government.

External stakeholders had myriad responses as to what the government is responsible for in regard to relocation. Some argued that Ministries were there to provide technical expertise with infrastructure and building of the relocated site. Others stated a more hands-off approach with the government being responsible for educating people about climate change, and warning villagers that sea levels would continue to rise. Some argued that only the TLTB needed to be involved in demarcating proposed village boundaries to ensure there would be no land issues. This claim was disputed under the assertion that government intervention is unnecessary because the land already belongs to the people. A few government workers viewed the government role similar to the villagers in respect to the general obligation government has to its people. As one government worker proclaimed, “It’s the duty of the government to assist. It equates with the concept of the government to help its people.” For this individual, government intervention in relocation is not distinct. It is a reflection of their overall responsibility.

The above responses indicate overt reasons for government *lack of* intervention in village relocations, but people remained skeptical about the underlying motivations of the relocation initiative. Most people did not believe that the government was acting altruistically, but speculated that Vunidogoloa’s national level relocation project was being dictated by public relations for Prime Minister Bainimarama’s election and

international level affairs. On a national level, people noted that the relocation conveniently coincided with Fiji's first democratic election since the military coup of 2006, which was led by now Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama. On an international level, it was reiterated that there was a political agenda with the climate change discourse. This was entangled with the upcoming Conference of Parties 21 meeting in Paris, in which the Alliance of Small Island States were advocating for a Loss and Damage article, separate from the Green Climate Fund (Pacific Island Development Forum Secretariat 2015). Under this provision, Vunidogoloa and other communities *forced* to relocate would receive compensation from the international community. Furthermore, government workers proclaimed that all future relocations would be contingent on international funding. This sentiment indicates that government assistance with relocation is temporary in that the government will only be involved as long as international donor organizations are interested in funding relocation efforts.

## 2.7 Call Me Daddy

"The village leader keeps telling people I call him Daddy." "It's good you don't call him Daddy in front of people." "What are you talking about? I don't call him Daddy at all."

—Conversation about "Daddy"

Although the government role was contested, the role of the villagers in the relocation was unequivocal. Villagers and local government workers unanimously agreed that the community was always intended to be active participants. They were expected to share part of the project costs and labor in order to alleviate government's fiscal pressure. Participation was also symbolic in that the community would execute agency over their

livelihoods. As one government worker pointed out,

> When we move them using their resources, they have something in their heart to keep them focused in what we were doing. If we had just taken money to relocate them, they wouldn't have the ownership of the project itself. By using their resources, it means the community is committed towards the plan that we were making for them. [We didn't want them to say], "You guys came in and took us here." If something happens in the future [they would] keep on pointing to the government, "This is you. You came in, dismantled our houses, and told us to move there." But we don't want that to happen.

His claim also draws reference to a cautionary tale of government liability for any unintended consequences. In this context, participation is utilized as a government insurance policy to protect external stakeholders, while simultaneously being used as a mechanism to empower the community.

The above quote coincides with the new narrative of environmental governance integrating a multistakeholder approach to adaptation measures. Civil society, NGOs, and scholars have argued that traditional approaches to environmental problems where the affected have little say in the decision-making process is ineffective (Hugo 2011). Moreover, archaic models of environmental governance do not align with the desired tenets of environmental justice, which call for a more participatory process (Endres 2012). Instead, there is a general push for institutional reform, which cultivates a more inclusive model, while allowing communities to execute agency over their livelihoods. By democratizing decisions and allowing local populations to have an input on proposed environmental policy, it ensures an equal distribution of costs and benefits amongst community members (McCoy and Haenn 2013). On a local level, participatory processes also increase the quality of environmental policy by ensuring the propositions are more applicable to meet the wants, concerns, and needs of the affected community (Vincent 2004). Furthermore, numerous studies (Ostrom 1990; Stern and Dietz 2008) have shown

that when those affected are involved in the decision-making process they are more likely to consent, and work towards upholding the necessary measures for the project.

Critics of public participation argue participation is a generalized term that *assumes* better environmental policy (Bixler et al. 2015; Cornwall and Brock 2005). Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock (2005:1044) maintain that terms such as “participation” and “empowerment” are buzzwords in environmental-development policy that are “carrying the allure of optimism and purpose, as well as considerable normative power.” While these words are attractive, and often times necessary to legitimize policy, actors fail to identify how they translate on the local level, which affects the form public participation takes (Bixler at al. 2015; Cornwall and Brock 2005). Others argue that no process is inherently participatory because the rules of participation are already established by external actors (Goldman 2005; Vincent 2004). Thus, outside power is preserved by forcing the community to engage in a process in which the parameters of their role are predetermined.

Public participation in environmental governance creates an illusion of inclusiveness, while silencing discussions on power. Contrary to assumption, participation does not automatically equate to successful outcomes because decisions about the environment are never neutral. They are always rooted in complex political, social, and cultural interests often resulting in conflict, which exposes unequal power relations in subtle ways including who participates in specific discussions and who prevails in decision-making (Lukes 1974; McCoy and Haenn 2013; Stern and Dietz 2008). In addition, participation is a symbolically powerful tool itself used as a mechanism to legitimate projects. As controllers of the process, external stakeholders

may comply with participatory processes to receive support, but they can choose to dismiss public input altogether. Paul Stern and Thomas Dietz (2008:53) go so far as to postulate that public participation can even *disempower* stakeholders, "both by those who participated ('they've had their say') and those who did not ('they've had their chance')." As a result, public consultations can allow more powerful actors to fulfill the tenets of environmental justice, and simultaneously reinforce existing hierarchies. Because of these flaws, researchers have doubted the extent to which participatory decision-making models are truly democratic (McCoy and Haenn 2013).

Steven Lukes's (1974) insights regarding the different dimensions of power is useful for illustrating how authority manifested in the relocation process. For the following discussion, I only highlight his first two dimensions of power because of the salience of them to my immediate analysis. In the first dimension, rooted in the pluralist approach, an actor exerts control by winning an argument. In this case, power is exercised in a paternalistic manner, in which a parent (external stakeholders) demands that a child (village) behaves in a certain way, or fulfils a certain task. In the second dimension, power involved the ability to set the agenda. In this sense, the government (external stakeholders) can omit the masses (villagers) from conversations. Essentially, those in power dictate what choices are on the table for discussion. The following paragraphs highlight the complexity of public participation, and illustrate specific examples of how power revealed itself according to these two dimensions in the relocation of Vunidogoloa.

The role of the villagers in the relocation was complex. On one hand, they were empowered by their position as vested stakeholders. Interviewees recalled with pride the

commitment they had to ensuring the success of the project. Men and women were eager to share the story of their hard work. They viewed the relocation as a blessing, but acknowledged the long days they devoted to constructing the new site. In addition, they talked about their role in financing the project. Women made sasa brooms to sell in Savusavu, and they held *solis* (ceremonial money giving contribution towards a village project). But the bulk of the financing came from logging.

Vunidogoloa was in an advantageous position relative to other communities, because they had resources on their land, which they were able to utilize. Following the government's suggestion, the village raised money by logging part of their forest. With assistance from the Northern Commissioners Office, Vunidogoloa was able to obtain a logging permit, set up a contract with a local mill in Labasa, and raise approximately 250 thousand Fiji dollars. They were also active in the construction of the new site. Able-bodied men from the village worked with the National Employment Center (NEC) to build houses, while the women brought breakfast and lunch every day from the original site. Women's contributions came in the form of unpaid domestic labor, men were compensated with an hourly wage, and the NEC workers became certified contractors through the building process. Despite being represented in the fundraising and construction of the new houses, local actors were excluded from consultations about the layout of their village and their houses, both of which ended up being areas of contention for the community.

Although villagers participated in the relocation, bureaucratic organization of the process was skewed to favor national interests over local interests. Villagers were described as *vested stakeholders*, but the form participation took did not allocate an

adequate amount of agency to them. Prior to the national level relocation campaign of Vunidogoloa, villagers were in charge of moving and building their houses, the village church, and the community hall. They executed full control over their community and livelihood within their community. In the relocation process, villagers lost all autonomy over their households and villages; the people had no control over their houses including the size, color, and any extensions they would like to make. Furthermore, there was never a consultation process in which all stakeholders—villagers, local, and national government ministries—were present.

Local government actors argued that if they were properly consulted they would have fought for the community to have more influence over the layout of their village and the size of their house. It was unclear as to why local actors were excluded from certain conversations, but some interviewees alluded to the exclusion as a power struggle. The relocation was described as a battle of wills and egos that deviated from a collaborative effort. It was referred to as an "I" project, as in individual versus collective, rather than a "we" project. Government workers emphasized that although this was a multistakeholder effort, external actors (national government) frequently attempted to override local actors (Provincial Office and villagers) by dismissing their input. Although there is no way to validate this claim, there are visible indicators of external actors' political interest in the outcome of the relocation.

The symbolic nature of the government's agenda was indicative in numerous characteristics of the newly relocated village. First, the sign demarcating the village reads, "Vunidogoloa Climate Change Relocation *Project*," followed by a listing of the various stakeholders involved in the relocation. The sign represents how the relocation

process transformed Vunidogoloa from a *village* to a *project.* It also demonstrates how the relocation converted ownership of Vunidogoloa from belonging to the people to a *product of* the government agencies. Furthermore, the listing of the various stakeholders exemplifies a self-proclaimed government triumph, while redirecting attention from the actual outcome of the project. Ironically enough, the villagers are not listed as being part of the multistakeholder effort. Their omission as vested stakeholders adds to the invisibility of the villagers' role by giving the illusion to passersby that the community members were not active participants in the process.

Secondly, the political interest of the external stakeholders was evident in the village layout. Vunidogoloa was intended to have a certain "look." It was organized in a very specific way that would spark the interest of people driving along the main road of Cakaudrove Province. National government workers spoke about how they wanted outsiders to look over and say, "What's this, a housing subdivision?" Moreover, villagers cannot deviate from the uniformity of the village. A few individual households spoke about building an extension to their house, but were stopped by village leaders because the government had a "plan." They were told that all modifications have to comply with a blueprint created by the Ministry of Local Government, Housing, and Environment because the government does not want people to ruin the "look" of the village. When I further inquired about these plans, villagers contended that the government had them, but they had never seen them. It was thus clear that the government did not intend to seek their input or feedback concerning the layout of the village or the construction of their houses.

The villagers' omission from consultation processes led to undesirable outcomes

regarding the layout of the village. I was told that the Ministry of Local Government, Housing, and Environment designed the houses and layout, but I was never able to speak to the individual/s who were part of the process. In addition, nobody seemed to know who executed the designs and the rationale behind deviating from a customary village arrangement. Contrary to the image of a housing subdivision, which is more indicative of an urban setting designed by the government, many elders commented that they would have preferred a more traditional village setting. This entails the houses being built in a straight line, so you can see into the front door of the neighboring house. In addition, a traditional layout has the church at the center of the village to symbolize the importance of religion for Fijian culture. For the new village setting, the placement of the church at the top of the village was said, by the village leaders, to represent, "Us looking up at God." However, reorganization of the traditional village layout had strong implications for the elders for cultural and spatial reasons.

Elders spoke about the importance of having the church be the focal point of the village, as a way to more strongly represent this element of the village. This was a missed opportunity, especially considering that the original site was also not a traditional village setting, as people were unable to organize their houses and structures around a focal point. The expansion of the rivers that ran through the village in conjunction with coastal erosion caused a complete loss of land, forcing people to build where they could find space. An elderly man pointed out that people even stopped building houses because of a lack of space, and started to move in with other families.

However, the deviation of the church from the center of the community had the strongest implications for the elders' church attendance. Most elders no longer attended

church services because the structure is located at the top of the hill. For younger able-bodied people, moving up and down the hill is not a problem, but for the elders the two-minute trek up a steep muddy incline is near impossible. If they left the house, walking down the slope, they were unable to walk back up the hill, so they opted not to leave their homes. In addition, there are no footpaths in the village because the government has not come back to build them as they promised. The lack of mobility and inability to attend church negatively impacted the elders' psychological well-being and their role in the village.

The elders' absence from church and village events was apparent amongst the whole community. While the elders can account for their experience, the younger villagers were also affected by the elders being absent from church. During interviews, the majority of the villagers mentioned the alienation of the elders from the community because of the hillside topography, arguing that they wished there was more consideration for people's age during the relocation. Similar to the elders, the youth wanted the church to be at the center of the village so the elders could more easily attend.

The houses themselves were also an aspect of the relocation in which the villagers did not participate. This component is pivotal to address for a couple of reasons: (1) these are people's primary living dwelling, and (2) the Vunidogoloa housing model is the precedent structure for future relocations. According to government workers, the standard Cyclone 4 open twenty-foot by sixteen-foot room designed by The Ministry of Housing is anticipated to be the standard house for all villages to be relocated under the National Relocation Guidelines. Yet, this model was created despite some households having five children and two adults, or four adults living under one roof. As a result, many young

couples with numerous children, with intentions to grow their families, were forced to live in cramped conditions.

Inquiries about the house illustrated the lack of authority and knowledge villagers had in this specific part of the relocation. Villagers responded that the government designed the house. Similarly, government workers also maintained that the *government* designed the houses. Yet no one had a response when I asked why the houses were built with no kitchens, or did not take into consideration household size. Moreover, no one could exactly say *who* designed the house. The ambiguity of the *government* contributes to the invisibility of the people who comprise the government. This made it impossible to demystify the logic behind the housing structures.

Local level actors speculated with uncertainty that financial constraints put restrictions on the size of the housing. They spoke about the inadequacies of the houses, and made reference to the lack of autonomy people had over their homes. A government worker stated,

> They [government officials] said if you shift [relocate], this is the size of the house we will provide…. The houses are small. I see that the houses are not really what we expect from a house. If you have a house you need a room and a kitchen. There's no extension of the kitchen. That is the biggest drawback.

The above response elucidates a couple areas of contention. First, government workers were aware of the subpar nature of the houses, but disregarded this component. Second, government workers were pointing to the government as the culprit of the design. "The government designed the house," was the universal response, but this entity was talked about as a fictitious beast with no face. No person or ministry was responsible, or taking responsibility for the housing structure. As a result, there was no one to speak to and clarify if this is in fact intended to be the standard model for all future relocations, if the

houses at Vunidogoloa are an isolated incident, or if there is any intention of completing the project.

Despite the controversy, people did enjoy some of the modern amenities including plumbing and water taps. All houses were built with a toilet. At the old site, people were defecating in the mangroves. Plumbing at the old site was impossible because seawater would bubble up from the ground. Also, all houses had an individual shower, so people have some privacy for bathing. At the same time, villagers spoke about drainage problems already occurring with the shower and toilet because the NEC workers who assisted with construction of the village were not certified contractors.

The single-family living dwelling also impacted people unevenly. Rural villages are socially and economically stratified, so less well-off households experienced an increase in their standard of living. Some households in the old village were living in tin structures, which were vulnerable to storms and floods. The wood structure of the new house can sustain the heavy rains and winds. For these households, it would have been impossible to afford the lumber for a wood house. Furthermore, the site by the sea had some houses with three families in one household, but in the new site every married couple was able to receive their own home. This added to the consumption of individual households, yet female interviewees living with multiple families stated that the single-family dwelling alleviated household work because they only had to worry about taking care of their family.

Satisfaction with the houses was not a uniform response amongst the villagers. It caused turmoil for some because they were forced to leave still standing and larger houses at the old site. People spoke about missing their old house because it was bigger,

and more accommodating to their family size or occupation. Other households had privacy at their old sites. At the old site, the bone doctors had multiple rooms for their patients, but the new houses had limited space for their patients. For this family, the structure itself posed an issue, but the restrictions placed on villagers, which do not allow them to modify their house, do not give them the opportunity to do anything about their situation.

In this section I highlighted the collaborative relationship between the government and the community. I illustrated evidence of how power is still present in participatory decision-making models and exerted by those who have control over processes. Dictating the ways in which people are *allowed* to participate reinforces already existing hierarchies. I also provided evidence of environmental justice scholars' assertion that a lack of community participation often leads to inadequate solutions that do not meet the needs and wants of the community.

## 2.8 *Isa* (Sigh of remembrance)

"My daughter asked me, 'Are the girls really leaving?'"

–Conversation with woman in the village

A stark disparity between the actual outcome and the portrayal of Vunidogoloa exposed a complex phenomenon. I struggled to make sense of the different responses and bureaucratic disorganization, until an external stakeholder who observed the Vunidogoloa relocation asked me, "You went to Vunidogoloa. Do you think it was a success?" I replied, "It depends on how you define success. If the goal is to move people away from an eroding coastline, then yes the relocation is a success. If it is meant to increase the

standard of living for people, then I don't know." The question caught me off guard, but it elucidated another question, what is the purpose of these relocations?

Defining the project as a success is arduous because to do so requires a clearly stated goal—one that was never defined for the relocation. It also illuminated a set of questions about the appropriate process for relocation. What should the standard housing model for relocated villages look like? How much agency should community members have in the consultation of relocation? These were all questions that were raised in the midst of my research.

After leaving Vunidogoloa, I was left with a question that I continued to ponder throughout my stay in Fiji. Why were rumors about the relocation of Vunidogoloa circulating throughout Suva? Why were people adamant that villagers were still living at the old site? Why did people believe the houses were two bedrooms with a kitchen, living room, and toilet attached to the house? Why did people believe that everyone wanted to move? The circulating discourses varied between positive and negative. Some had *heard* that the relocation was a success: fluid and simple. Others had asserted, "I *heard* that Vunidogoloa was a failure" or "I *heard* there were still villagers living at the old site." Some had relied on what they *read* in the newspaper about the relocation, which depicted a favorable outcome. These inconsistencies signified a communication breakdown within government, between government agencies, and NGOs. It is still unclear if the misinformation being spread is intentional. What causes this inaccuracy, government malevolence to hide a subpar project? Is it an innocent game of telephone with conversations being lost or transformed? Is the Fiji government mimicking the tactic of the World Bank in which they "green" themselves, and create national level climate

change institutions to legitimize state intervention in village affairs (Goldman 2005)?

As word continued to spread about some of the questionable characteristics of the relocation, I felt as if the government was trying to maintain the illusion of a positive outcome. A month prior to leaving Fiji, I was told by a University of the South Pacific scholar who often works with communities, that the government was not going to allow researchers to visit Vunidogoloa anymore. I am unaware of the accuracy of this statement, or if more researchers went to Vunidogoloa after I left. Despite this uncertainty, there are some characteristics that I feel confident to speak on because my fieldwork in the village gave me the opportunity to *see* firsthand the outcome of the relocation.

Two years after supposed completion, the relocation remained incomplete. The village was still littered with drainage piping, and was facing other environmental problems, including erosion from the mountaintop that was blown up by the military as preparation for the newly relocated site. There were still no footpaths, inhibiting the mobility of the elderly. People still had no access to blueprints allowing them to modify their houses. The community hall was still unfinished after the construction company hired by the government abandoned the project (with the village's money) when they took Christmas break in 2014. After two years, the community was still *waiting* for the government to fulfill their end of the bargain. The village will likely be waiting for an indefinite amount of time, because external actors at the national level maintain that Vunidogoloa is complete and they will not be returning.

As I described in the introduction, the practical goal of this dissertation is to act as a document to better inform other environmentally induced relocations. Therefore, I

concluded every interview with the same question, what can make future relocations better? Most villagers were pleased by the outcome, maintaining that they would not change a thing. They were grateful for the government's help. Nobody expressed discontentment, but this is cultural. In Fiji people are not encouraged, nor allowed, to criticize the government for fear of repercussions, which come in the form of no government assistance for their village. While villagers were hesitant to answer this question, people eventually responded knowing that their answers will be used to inform other relocations in Fiji. In addition, interviews clearly illustrated a critique of the relocation process in which people identified the problematic nature of the housing structure, village layout, and some unfulfilled promises made by the government.

Government officials *and* villagers gave a uniform response to the above question, the government should fulfill their end of the bargain. As one local government worker maintained, "In Vunidogoloa, the work has still not been done. The construction did not live up to the expectation of what was said would be done." He went on to express how the government should conduct themselves when working with villages, "Don't give false promises to them…. My fear is that if we make promises to the villagers and they are not met, it will break trust."

# CHAPTER 3

# GENDER IN VUNIDOGOLOA

## 3.1 Introduction

According to the United Nations Human Development Report (UNHD) Gender Inequality Index (United Nations Development Program 2017:217), Fiji was ranked 75 out of all nations in 2015. Categorized as a high development country, women are less likely to participate in the labor force, only 16 percent of seats in Parliament are held by women, and women make 6,981 Fiji dollars less a year than their male counterparts (United Nations Development Program. 2017:212). Although not specified in this report, the subordination of women is also evident in high rates of gendered violence, specifically intimate partner violence and sexual assault (UN Women 2014).

In order to remedy the status of women, the Fijian government has made gender equality a priority through designing national campaigns, restructuring domestic violence laws, and increasing funding towards women's resources. Nevertheless, Fijian women continue to face discrimination despite political attempts to abolish structural barriers that contribute to their lack of participation in local level decision-making. Part of this cyclical oppression is an unwillingness to acknowledge gender inequality on the local level. Ongoing gender inequality was evident throughout my fieldwork, but locals often dismissed its effects. It was not uncommon to hear people make comments such as, "We

love our women" or, "Men do everything the women do" when discussing whether or not Fijian women are treated equal to Fijian men. Yet, community level hierarchies and practices contribute to the silencing of women's voices. The disconnection between what is promoted on the national level and what transpires on the local level illustrates the limitation of structural mechanisms to generate change.

While policies and structures should not be ignored, it is important to emphasize that they work in conjunction with culture to exacerbate gender inequalities (Glick, Fiske, Mladinic et al. 2000; Salzman 1999). Expectations and attitudes about appropriate female behavior are often shrouded in "tradition." For example, throughout the rural areas, women must adhere to village bylaws that dictate rules of conduct. In general, there are more rules for women than men concerning modesty, dress, behavior, where to sit at mealtime, and when to eat. They are expected to listen at village meetings, but not actively participate. In more traditional villages and households, women are excluded from social activities such as kava drinking, a common pastime which serves as a storytelling and sharing of information sphere. Women also act as the primary caretakers of the household, doing a disproportionate amount, if not all, of the cooking, washing, cleaning, and tending to the children.

NGOs, the government, and grassroots organizations are continuously taking concrete steps toward curbing inequality and creating a more gender equal atmosphere in the country through legal reforms such as education and harsher penalties for perpetrators of sexual violence. For example, UN Women and church organizations target rural villages specifically and hold workshops about the importance and benefits of gender equality. In these visits, they speak to groups of women, but also men to discuss concerns

of domestic violence, sexual assault, and the importance of including women in household decisions. But women continue to face discrimination primarily because institutional efforts need to be implemented alongside cultural change; in order for social change to occur (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Men and women alike will often adhere to traditional roles that further impede progress towards gender equality. In an overview on why gender equality rises in some regions of the world and not others, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2003:9) argue, “Where traditional values prevail, women are not only limited by society in terms of the opportunities they seek, but also choose to limit themselves.” The authors illustrate the need for cultural reform in regions that adhere to strict gendered codes of conduct, not only by men but also by women.

This sentiment was particularly true in relation to decision-making in Vunidogoloa. It is important to note that not *all* families in the village followed patriarchal patterns, yet village elders, men, *and* women alike often showed resistance to gender equality. In this chapter, I specifically discuss the substantial role gender played in the relocation of Vunidogoloa, including how gender roles dictated who participated in the decision to relocate, and how women have been disproportionately impacted by the move inland. I begin by generally discussing gender inequality in Fiji, and the emergence of the Fiji women’s rights movement as a response to enhancing women’s rights. I then examine how the discourse on gender inequality strategically embedded itself in the climate change discourse. I conclude with a discussion of how the national discourse on gender equality translated on the local level with the decision to relocate, and the impact this had for the women of Vunidogoloa.

## 3.2 We Love Our Women

"We say *taucoko.* It means together. Men and women go together."

–Discussion on men and women sharing village duties

During a women's meeting in Vunidogoloa, a younger woman mentioned that one of the men in the village accused the Women's Committee of not giving the Chief his allocated amount from the fishpond harvest. The women were being reprimanded and shamed for supposedly not following traditional rules. Contrary to government advice that attempts to diminish Chiefly control over villages, traditional custom grants the Chief 10 percent of the fish harvest, with the remainder to be sold back to the individual houses. Some women were upset, maintaining that the Chief was allocated his portion, and they wanted to correct the person who was accusing them of not following protocol. However, an elderly woman interjected and advised the women to ask for the Chief's forgiveness. She reminded them that it was their job to allow the men to make decisions, and as women it was their role to support the men and their choices. The rest of the women immediately acquiesced, bringing a kava root to the Chief as an apologetic peace offering. The elderly woman's response calls attention to the various ways in which traditional gender roles compete with changing ideas of gender equality. At the same time, there is a growing and vocal women's rights movement in Fiji addressing these inequalities.

The Fiji women's rights movement is considered the strongest and most outspoken in the Pacific Islands with numerous successes on the national and international political front (George 2012; Mishra 2000). Through continuous pressure from the movement, the national government ratified two international doctrines that promote gender equality:

The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, an international bill that addresses the rights of women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a treaty that advocates on behalf of the rights of underage rape victims (Biersack and Macintyre 2016). By gradually taking up agendas on the legislative level, other organizations such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Center could direct their attention and resources towards local level outreach (Mishra 2000).

The women's rights movement in Fiji has proliferated and transformed amid varying political contexts. In the 1960s, the colonial government established the Fiji Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) to assist with the development of Fijian women's domestic duties. The organization eventually became an avenue to address racial inequalities between indigenous Fijian, Indian-Fijian, and European women. While it made strides towards racial equality by uniting women of all ethnicities under one organization and established the first desegregated kindergarten, it was criticized for being elitist (George 2012). The YWCA was depicted as a privileged organization with membership confined to upper class whites and indigenous Fijian women (George 2012). Not until the postindependence era did the movement for gender equality open to all women across the South Pacific.

The country gained independence from British rule in 1970, right as second wave feminism was peaking in the United States. The rise of feminism in the West, coupled with a wave of decolonization across the world, created an atmosphere of cultural change where Western ideas became diffused onto the developing world (Strang 1991). During this time, women studying at University of the South Pacific in Suva were exposed to the scholarship of Western feminists such as Betty Friedan (Mishra 2012). Female activist

Vanessa Griffen (1984:518) reflected on this time in her essay "The Pacific Islands: All it Requires is Ourselves" in which she states,

> It is difficult to look back and trace the origins of a developing women's consciousness in the Pacific. I can only speak from my own experience and that of friends, of our first early awareness of the women's movement that was developing in other countries of the world.
>
> We were students at our own regional University of the South Pacific, in the early 1970's. The university was new and we were some of the first women students. This didn't particularly impress us at the time, since we saw no reason why we should *not* be there: we were unaware of sexism in the sense that no one told us a situation existed in which women were unequal, downtrodden, trained to be wives and mothers, and that exceptions would be to the contrary rather than the rule. Somehow, it filtered down to us, by way of books, articles, items in the press, that women in some parts of the world were saying that this was—and did not have to be—so….
>
> For those of us beginning to pick up the issues of the women's movement, feminist events in other countries, as reported (with amusement) in the media, were not helpful. The label "women's liberation" was especially suspect among older, more established women's groups. However, the publicity could not be escaped.

Although it was alive and vibrant in other countries, Griffen and her colleagues saw feminism as not reflecting their lived experiences or resonating with their political concerns, but instead representing the interests of mostly white Western women.

The year 1975 marked International Women's Year and a new international agenda in which the United Nations pressured countries to actively participate in the UN conference to discuss gender inequality (Griffen 1984). International pressure not only *forced* countries to comply it also encouraged women to organize on the national and regional level. This was particularly true for Pacific women who held their first regional conference that same year in which they altered the discourse to fit within the context of their time and place (Mishra 2012; Riles 2000). Instead of being passive recipients of the women's rights discourse, they identified and responded to what they saw as pressing

issues for South Pacific women, specifically focusing on "the traditional role of women in the home, how women were not represented in decision-making, how colonialism had removed many of the traditional rights of women and was a system of daily oppression" (Griffen 1984:519).

The trajectory of the Fiji women's rights movement shows how the local interacts with both the national and the international. These different scales work with and against each other at times to push different agendas. Yet, the interesting component is not how transnational discourses diffuse on to countries, but rather how national actors *own* these discourses. In Fiji, more recently, national actors have modified the women's rights discourse to align itself with the dominant regional narrative of climate change.

Transnational discourses on the women's rights movement have altered domestic level policies by synchronizing with state level political organizations to promote gender equality on the local and national level (Kardam 2004; Suh 2011). Global discourses do not infiltrate local politics in a unidirectional matter, but they are strategically placed within specific agendas (Mendez 2005). In her study on transnational feminism in rural Brazil, Millie Thayer (2010:55) describes feminism as a "travelling theory" that is constantly transformed as "meanings meet resistance in new contexts, and are forced to shift as they cross or, more accurately, are trafficked across different kinds of borders." Her quote debunks the myth that social movements are homogenously translated. Rather, global discourses, specifically feminism, become heterogeneous when aligned with domestic issues. Thayer (2010) uses the example of SOS Corpo, a Brazilian nongovernmental women's health organization, to show how the group allied itself with Brazil's democratization movement during the 1990s by taking on issues of "citizenship."

By doing so they politicized the female body, arguing, "The body was constituted as the carrier of (reproductive) rights and, therefore, a subject of politics beyond the self" (Thayer 2010:77). Strategically, SOS's alignment with the democratization (Left) movement broadened its framework giving it the opportunity to occupy political spaces.

Similar to Thayer's (2010) analysis on SOS Corpo, Fijian organizations have adopted a comparable strategy. On a macro scale, Fijian organizations have aligned themselves within the climate change agenda to politicize women's empowerment. For example, Fijian officials mainstream gender issues in the climate change discourse by recognizing "that addressing gender based inequality and discrimination is essential for effective action on climate change" (Pacific Island Development Forum Secretariat 2015:3). Through the politicized environmental discussion, government and NGO workers are continuously pushing the intersections between gender and climate change to promote a cultural change. They are advocating for a change of attitude that promotes equal representation of all community members for local level adaptations and demanding that all women be actively engaged in village decisions. Furthermore, international organizations and the national government take a hands-on approach to promoting equality by empowering women through education, workshops, and different training opportunities for rural women. Specifically, representatives from the Fijian government's Ministry of Women and UN Women will periodically visit rural villages to educate men and women on the benefits of enhancing female participation in village meetings. Still, the national promotion of gender equality in Fiji and how exactly it translates on the local level is elusive.

Despite national policies directed towards generating equality, there is still local

resistance. For example, in 2012, UN Women paid for a female representative from rural villages to attend Barefoot College in India for eight months. Barefoot College's mission is to empower rural communities and simultaneously alleviate poverty by "bringing the value of community knowledge and skills into mainstream thinking in modern technology, engineering, and architecture" (Roy and Hartigan 2008:70). As part of the College's outreach, it selected Vunidogoloa and nine other rural villages in Fiji to be part of the organization's solar initiative, which gifted every household in the ten villages three solar lights and trained a woman from each village to act as her community's solar engineer. According to a UN Women representative, the program had a dual purpose: (1) to provide sustainable electricity to rural villages and (2) to provide an opportunity for women to be financially independent from their husbands. The intention was for the women to charge households 5 Fiji dollars to install the lights, conduct any future repairs, and train other women in the village. However, when asked about the project, a Vunidogoloa government worker commented about one of the women, "She came back and trained her husband." He went on to explain the disconnect between the intention and the outcome, positing, "You know lifestyle, attitude, so she thought it was safer to first share the knowledge with her husband." Stories like this and the interview process itself highlight the conflict between universal women's rights and socially recognized rights.

## 3.3 What He Said

"My husband will answer for me."

—Women's response to my request for an interview

Villagers are aware of women's rights, but did not always agree that women should be equal to their male counterparts. Elders were more likely to emphasize the traditional role of women as submissive to men. *Culturally appropriate* female passivity was primarily depicted in the interview process, whereby women often refused to be interviewed without their husbands present and I was asked to come back when husbands were home. In some cases, women would merely respond, "What my husband said" to every question I posed. In other cases, women would say, "My husband will answer for me," prior to starting the interview. Interviews with elder men often deviated to an unsolicited discussion on women's rights. Amid questions about climate change, men would interrupt with comments about the role of women in the family. Some elderly men maintained that women should be at home taking care of their children and their husbands, instead of receiving an education. These divergences often felt personal, as I was repeatedly asked where my husband was and why I was not back in the United States with him. One elderly male argued, "Women's rights threatens my culture." He expressed frustration that he could no longer tell a woman to go home and put on her *sulu* because she had rights and he was forced to respect them. Another male interviewee spoke about his discomfort with women being part of the kava sessions at the new site, maintaining that on some nights, "They're there before the men." He interpreted this shift in behavior as the moral decay of femininity. The taboo nature of female kava drinking was also expressed in fleeting comments by elderly women who made it clear that they

only drink kava on special occasions, like when a visitor comes to the village. The older men's comments on a shift in female dress and kava drinking show how culture is used to rationalize *appropriate* female behavior. For the elder man, his culture gave him the authority to dictate to a woman what she should be wearing and what activities she should and should not be engaged in.

Men also expressed anxiety when discussing a shift away from traditional standards of beauty for Fijian women. Men frequently commented on women changing their look by incorporating a more Western style. They saw these changes as a consequence of the relocation, arguing that Vunidogoloa's newly acquired access to the main road created more accessibility to town, outsiders, and what villagers referred to as "modern ideas." However, there was a gendered dimension to the susceptibility of outside influences. Only men made references to a shift in women's behavior and style. They expressed frustration that women no longer wore the traditional *sulu chamba* (traditional dress for women consisting of an ankle length *sulu* and matching top), except to church. Women were starting to wear pants and pluck their eyebrows. The way women were wearing their hair was also an area of contention mentioned by men in my interviews. For Fijian women, their hair marks their identity. Traditionally women wear their hair in a *buiniga*, or what is commonly known in the United States as an "afro." To change it is a deviation from the traditional way of life. Men were agitated when they spoke of women changing their hair from the *buiniga* to a longer, straighter, and often dyed hairstyle. As one man argued in response to women changing their hair, "We don't need women tying their hair. We want to see Fijian women with their Fijian hair. If you see a woman anywhere in the world you know this is a Fijian lady because of her hair."

While the relocation may be a contributing factor, there were other mechanisms that were influencing the shift in perceptions of gender behavior and appearance. The complacency of women as subordinate to their male counterparts was a generational trend. Although women in their 20s and 30s still preferred to be interviewed with their husbands, they were more active in the interview process. They disagreed with their husbands on timelines. In contrast to older men, younger men solicited their wives' opinions. They opted out of questions and made comments about how their wife might know more about when the tides started to change. The youth never mentioned women's rights as an issue, and for the most part never mentioned it at all in relation to the relocation efforts

The older generation discussed new ideas like changing appearances and the decline of male authority *in the household* as a threat to *tradition*, but the younger generation embraced these changes. For example, younger men and women saw exposure to new ideas, including female participation in kava drinking and less strict dress codes infiltrating the village, not as a threat, but a sign of people being more "open-minded." These generational trends indicate a moderate shift in gendered expectations including less strict codes of conduct for women and more egalitarian household interactions. However, the degree of these shifts was minimal. Traditional practices that rendered a complete redistribution of power in decision-making processes between men and women remained intact.

In her study on Melanesian women's rights, anthropologist Martha Macintyre (2000:147) highlights the existence of a modernist perspective in which male government representatives will "call for economic development and women's participation, and a

paternalistic appeal to 'tradition' that excludes women from representation." Macintyre's (2000) study draws a comparison between government's appeal to paternalism in the Pacific and the paternalism of the Western antisuffragist movement in the early twentieth century. In both contexts, men and women alike accepted the role of men as the representative of the household, village, and women's interests (Macintyre 2000). Her comparison between contemporary Pacific government and the antisuffragist movement suggests that colonizers introduced European paternalism resulting in the public-private sphere dichotomy in the Pacific. Due to the public-private divide, women have largely been excluded from government participation. She thus argues that there is nothing "traditional" about these gender roles, but they are a direct consequence of colonizers disorganizing and reorganizing Pacific social structures. In contrast to these findings, Tim Bayliss-Smith, Richard Bedford, Harold Brookfield, and Marc Latham (1988:112) argue, "The subordinate position of women is symbolized in all aspects of traditional Fijian ceremony. The modern inequalities were not created *de novo* by colonialism." To argue that colonizers brought gender inequality to the islands implies that Fijian life prior to European arrival was devoid of gendered power. Despite the emergence of contemporary gender roles, the private-public dichotomy has lasting implications for the women of Vunidogoloa.

## 3.4 The Scream No One Heard

"Have you went to the forest and screamed as loud as you could yet?

You should, it feels really good. No one can hear you out there"

—Advice on how to handle the restlessness of village life

Although the government addressed participation on the macro level between the external (government) and local (village) level, it was completely disregarded on the micro level between households in the village. More specifically, the traditional hierarchy in the village was not taken into consideration when the decision to relocate the village was made. According to tradition, control over decision-making processes is inextricably linked to the social standing of men within the village. This gives authority to the Chief, Turaga Ni Koro, and male elders, while ignoring women's opinions.

Traditional expectations of female passivity disqualified women from being part of the decision to relocate the village. This was illustrated in a conversation in which I asked one young woman, "Why didn't you attend the village meeting?" She replied, "I wasn't invited." I probed further, "Were you told not to go?" She clarified, "You're not told 'not to attend,' but if you are not asked to attend then you do not go." The use of traditional decision-making practices in this context undermined the democratic and inclusive process that government intervention demanded.

When most men spoke about the decision to relocate the village, it came across as if they were enacting a script. They insisted that everyone was present at the village meeting, and everyone voted to move—men, women, and youth. In theory, they adopted the ostensibly inclusive *democratic* agenda, which was being pushed by national and international actors. However, theoretical proclamations were decoupled from practice.

Female villagers and some men maintained that they were either not present at the meeting or were present but did not vote. The inconsistency of responses raises two questions. Was the decision to relocate inclusive? Why were people giving different accounts about who was involved in the decision to relocate?

Two specific interviews draw attention to the questions above. The first was an interview with a husband and wife in their 50s. The woman reiterated the story about the infamous village gathering in which everyone voted on the relocation. She contended that she was there (as an observer), but the villagers (men) were divided between some wanting to move and others wanting to stay. The man immediately interjected, “Everyone wanted to move.” This brief exchange revealed important details about the decision to relocate. First, the exchange exposed that the decision might not have been unanimous. While half of the interviewees, villagers and stakeholders alike, asserted that everyone wanted to move, the other half argued otherwise. Second, the man’s immediate interjection demonstrates an awareness of a legitimate process that should have occurred and what might have occurred.

The disagreement with the proposed unanimity of the village was a gendered response, which reveals the degree to which women were excluded from the initial decision to relocate. Male villagers treated the disagreement and lack of female participation in the decision to relocate as *insider knowledge.* It was depicted as a village secret that should not be shared with an outsider. The notion of a secret was exemplified in an interview where a male in his 40s addressed the contention around the supposed unanimity to move, dismissing it as a *rumor* and “noise” from other villages. He further argued that people were trying to “make trouble for them” because the government made

it clear they would not intervene unless 100 percent of the village agreed to relocate. He maintained that everyone did want to move, but neighboring villages were jealous that Vunidogoloa was receiving new houses, and they were attempting to sabotage their relocation effort.

On the contrary, women's forwardness with their non-role details the lack of knowledge they had to *how* the decision was supposed to be made. For the women, they were unaware of a specific protocol that was supposed to be followed for the relocation. Yet, the male interviewee's manipulation of the truth indicates access to privileged information. Those involved in the relocation were informed by government workers that there had to be consensus amongst the village before the government intervened. However, those not involved in the relocation were unaware that consensus was required because government workers were only communicating with village representatives.

The dispute with the villagers' unanimity to relocate was also reflected in government responses. An uncontested principle of all relocation efforts is that the decision to relocate is up to the village, furthermore, "Even if the family doesn't want to [relocate], but the village does then the family doesn't have to" (Interview exchange). However, there was a clear inconsistency between what was stated and what was practiced. Only one government official said that everyone wanted to move, maintaining, "There was never any resistance from the community themselves. They were the ones suffering from the hurricanes they had. There was never an argument in the community." The remainder of stakeholders and government workers reiterated that there was hesitancy from some households and that during moving day some households refused to leave.

It was undisputed amongst government officials that women were omitted from the process. Stakeholders were aware that women were excluded, one government worker said, "Women's perspectives were not considered during the effort to relocate. Women in this specific circumstance were disregarded." There was a clear decoupling between theory and practice. Moreover, government workers were *aware* of this fact, but continued with the relocation as if the women's omission from the decision was just the way it was always going to be. On the local level, women's input about the relocation was disregarded. Yet, they have been disproportionately impacted by the move—which I detail in the next section.

### 3.5 Did You Eat?

"Women are always thinking of the family."

–Conversation about women's role in the village

As a foreigner from the United States, I could navigate both male and female social spheres. My status as a white foreigner gave me privileges of Fijian men. I could engage in daily male duties and social activities including farming and kava drinking, which is where *talanoa* (story telling) sessions take place. At the same time, my female identity allowed me to navigate spaces in which men were not present. I could attend women's meetings. I could assist with mat weaving. I could cook with the women. Most importantly, I could fish with the women. These female occupied spaces were crucial to my research because I could engage in informal conversations with the women about their experiences at the newly relocated site. In addition, by engaging in women's daily chores I gained insight into how their lives were altered by the move inland.

The way in which the relocation impacted women is complex. It generated new efficiencies by alleviating some burdens for household chores. For example, every new house in Vunidogoloa was built with an individual tap for washing, so women started to spend less time waiting at the community tap and more time on other daily activities such as mat weaving, baking, and socializing. In this respect, relocation lessened the burden of female work within the existing patriarchal structure.

There were also unintended consequences to the relocation. The newly relocated Vunidogoloa is about a mile across the main road, along the unpaved trail, over the rocks, across the fallen trees, across the streams, and through the shrub from the ocean. The longer and more difficult journey to the sea has kept women spatially bound to the new village and limits their activities, including fishing. Some husbands did not allow their wives to make the journey, instead demanding they stay home to take care of the household. Whereas older women discussed physical limitations, maintaining that they were unable to make the long trek every day, and were lucky if they could go fishing twice a week.

Not only did the longer distance from the sea limit women's mobility, but it also heightened their concerns about food security. As the primary caretakers of the household, it is their duty to ensure that the family eats, and easy access to the ocean made this possible. The women of Vunidogoloa uniformly mentioned that they never worried about their family having food. Being right next to the sea meant that they could always go fishing. The move generated new dependencies on their husbands. With women not being able to fish, they were reliant on their husbands to go to the farm every day. Some families expressed frustration about this newly formed dependence arguing

that some men were lazy and drinking grog all day instead of going to the farm, an observation that was not unique to the women. Elder men also expressed pity for the families that were not eating because the men of the household were not doing their daily duties. The irony of this is that the relocated site is closer to the farms, so while it has made female chores more challenging, it has made male chores such as farming easier.

Along with the location of the new houses, the housing structures themselves pose unique challenges. The dominant challenge is that the houses were not built with kitchens. According to villagers and government workers, the Prime Minister held a grand opening for the relocated village because they were already behind schedule, but were supposed to come back to complete the "second phase," which would entail construction of the kitchens along with the community center, footpaths, and drainage. During this waiting period, the community was restricted from modifying their homes because the government had blueprints that ensured a uniform look for the village. Yet, construction workers and government workers never returned. The lack of a kitchen proved difficult for women who are responsible for cooking, but had nowhere to cook. After months of waiting, each household finally constructed its own tin kitchen. While some households took the initiative to build a kitchen, other households chose to wait for the government to return. Some were even told to stop construction by village leaders because the government informed the community that there was supposed to be a uniform look to the village. Those that chose to wait talked about having to share a kitchen during the time of uncertainty until finally it got too difficult and the women in most cases "begged" their husbands' to build a kitchen.

Culturally, women are expected to uphold standards of modesty. The relocation

also created issues in this regard. Each house was built with a toilet, so people no longer had to defecate in the mangroves. This gave everyone more privacy in one realm, but the one open room structure of the house also created little privacy for women to change their clothing. While women are meant to be discrete and reserved, they are not provided an adequate space to uphold these expectations.

It is important to acknowledge that gender itself is stratified, interacting with other variables such as age, income, and household dynamics, generating challenges for some while alleviating pressure for others. Although general claims can be difficult to extract from contextual experiences, we can anticipate how environmental adaptations and the gender division of labor disproportionately impacts women's experiences and work.

## 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter addresses two important components of the Vunidogoloa relocation. First, it adds to the environmental governance and participation section in the previous chapter by drawing attention to traditional decision-making models. When working in communities that have hierarchies contingent on sex, seniority (age), and rank (Chief), it is important to consider how *participation* translates on the most micro level (Toren 2005). Second, it adds to the scholarship on gender inequality in environmental decision-making. Across cultures, power relations disadvantage women, and women's roles in the household often make them more susceptible to environmental degradation. With a disregard of women's roles and voices in environmental community planning, adaptations run the risk of generating negative impacts such as heavier household burdens. In the case of Vunidogoloa, the disregard of women's roles and voices resulted

in relocation exacerbating women's dependence on the men and it created new concerns regarding food security. However, ensuring women's participation in adaptation measures has the capacity to produce autonomy and gender equity.

# CHAPTER 4

# NARIKOSO

## 4.1 Narikoso, the Most Beautiful Village

"My village is beautiful. It's right by the sea.

When you come to my village, I'll get you lobster."

–Conversation with Narikoso villager

Narikoso, located on Ono Island in the Kadavu group, is the most secluded of the three villages. The island cluster as a whole is more remote, less populated, and less developed than Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, but is noted throughout Fiji and the world for its beauty. The Kadavu Islands are where George Clooney's and Kim Kardashian's families escape for privacy. These are the islands foreigners typically see when they come across a promotion for a tropical Fiji vacation. The world is not seeing Fiji's informal settlements where a vast majority of the urban population lives, the rubbish that litters the beaches, or the inadequate health facilities in the rural areas—*the world is seeing Kadavu*.

Kadavu, although the fourth largest island of Fiji's 106 inhabited islands, is described by travel books as rugged and lacking "modern civilization" (Goodwin 2010:167). A travel writer for the Frommer's series (2010:167) refers to this group as "an excellent place to visit a village and experience relatively unchanged Fijian culture."

Along with the spectacle of indigenous Fijian life, Kadavu offers an array of activities including diving at the Great Astrolabe reef, kayaking along the mangrove forests, and bird-watching (Goodwin 2010).

The area is rich in activities for ecotourists with resorts promoting sustainable tourism, but the industry is still argued to be in its infancy (Goodwin 2010). Through my observation, I saw the truth in this statement, but also its inaccuracies. Comparatively, other tourist destinations around Fiji including Savusavu (*Fiji's Hidden Gem*), Suva, Labasa, and Levuka have an abundance of hotels and resorts to choose from, advertisements promoting drink specials, outdoor activity excursions, and live music. Kaivalagis can even be seen walking in the streets of these towns. None of this is visible in Kadavu.

After exploring these areas prior to visiting Narikoso, Bill Goodwin's (2010:167) depiction of the island cluster as rugged and having only "two dirt roads [that] really don't go anywhere" seems accurate. There are no markets; there are individuals selling snacks at the Vunisea dock. There are no restaurants; there are brothers of cousins offering to take people out fishing, and snorkeling for *nama* (sea grapes). There are no buses or cars; there are villagers transporting other villagers and guests from island to island in fiberglass boats.

Of these characteristics, Kadavu's lack of public transport, coupled with Fiji's land tenure structure are the most limiting to the tourist industry. Mataqalis—wealthy Americans and Australians—own most of the islands in Kadavu. As a result, tourists cannot freely *explore* without permission, reservations, or a boat. Although this limits outside visitors, it is simultaneously lucrative for the high-end tourist industry.

From Vunisea, where the Lomaviti Princess docks, to the village is a forty-five-minute fiberglass boat ride. The boat passes through small islands that make up the Kadavu group. The islands are diverse, varying in size, geography, and population. Most islands in this group, except for the main island, Kadavu, can be fully explored in a thirty-minute walk. Some have small tin houses along the coast, and others are called home only by the local flora, fauna, and endemic bird population—Kadavu Shining Parrot, Whistling Dove, Kadavu Honeyeater, and the Kadavu Fantail (Goodwin 2010).

The islands that stand out are the ones that have been plucked directly out of a travel brochure with traditional thatched bure bungalows on white sandy beaches. Similar to Vanua Levu's coastline, Kadavu has a visible contrast of wealth. In Vanua Levu, resorts are juxtaposed with impoverished villages, whereas in Kadavu the disparity of wealth is more elaborate with Western foreigners buying and developing whole islands.

In this chapter, I will assess how the decision to relocate was decided in the community. I will examine how the remoteness of Kadavu, along with its wealth disparity, created distinct features of the Narikoso relocation. I will then examine how the public portrayal of the relocation differed from what was occurring in the village. I will then look at some of the barriers that were stalling the relocation effort. Lastly, I will focus on how preparation to the new site resulted in further environmental degradation to Ono island.

## 4.2 Maybe?

"Here's what you do, ask 20 people the same question.

Go with the answer you get the most."

–Advice from a former Peace Corp volunteer stationed in Fiji

There are multiple stories about the Narikoso relocation. In one rendition, the government is responsible for suggesting the community relocate. In the other version, the community solicited government assistance. In addition to multiple stories, there is a clear divide as to who is telling which version. In what follows, I detail the narratives about how relocation came to be the appropriate adaptation.

In one account, a villager working in Suva at the time was concerned about sea level rise in Narikoso. In 2010, this community member invited Prime Minister Bainimarama to the village with the intention of asking for government assistance for relocation. Upon arrival, the Prime Minister expressed concern for the well-being of the villagers and immediately agreed to help them relocate. This version, with less detail and slight deviations, is similar to the story published in the *Fiji Sun* (Seru, Maikeli. "Narikoso, Vunidogoloa Relocation in August." July 19, 2013) in which, "The relocation of Narikoso Village was mooted by the Prime Minister, Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, during his visit to Kadavu in May, 2011. The villagers reported that their lives were at risk because of the rising sea level." From this visit, the relocation process started with Bainimarama sending in the Fiji military to prepare the land for the new village site. Yet, the villagers have a different account of the onset of relocation.

The other version of the relocation also starts in 2011, the same time as the Vunidogoloa relocation, when Prime Minister Bainimarama visited Ono Island while he

was campaigning for Fiji's first democratic election since the coup. According to islanders, the Bainimarama campaign was touring the rural areas to solicit votes for the 2014 election. During his visit with the twenty-eight households of Narikoso village, he asked the community, "What do you need?" There are two answers to this response. In one scenario, which was mentioned by only a couple of people who were advocating for the relocation, the community requested relocation because the sea was continuously inundating the village. In the second scenario, a more pervasive account, the community asked for financial assistance for a seawall, in which Bainimarama said, "No" because it would be too costly. Instead, he suggested the community move, arguing that it would be more cost effective for the government. Within a few months, in 2012, the government returned with the military to excavate and level the new site. From this point, the relocation started, and then stopped.

Adding to the conflicting narratives of relocation, there was an equal amount of confusion about the progression of the project. The villager's narrative, and my personal observations, differed from what was presented at conferences and depicted in the media. Contrary to other accounts, both of these mediums portrayed an image of success.

There is a parallel representation throughout the media of the state sponsored relocation projects in which they glorify the government, noting how well the project was organized and how it had a positive outcome. Although limited, of the media coverage that exists for Narikoso, there are two common themes that parallel the Vunidogoloa relocation. First, Nariksoso villagers' express gratitude towards the government, as is depicted in the newspaper, "They are grateful that Government has stepped in to assist and identify a new site where they would relocate to." (Moceituba, Atasa. "Erosion

Concerns." *Fiji Times,* June 25, 2015). Speaking on behalf of the village, Narikoso Development Committee chairman Kelepi Saukitoga was quoted, "I thank the Government and funders for their continued support towards our relocation plans. They have all been very supportive in delivering their help" (Rabulu, Solomone. "Villagers to Move." *Fiji Times,* September 11, 2015). In relation to the relocations, the media portrays the government as a proactive, socially responsible altruistic institution that is concerned with the well-being of its people. Second, the bulk of stories covering Narikoso are plagued with inconsistencies about the progress and success of the relocation. In the *Fiji Sun* (Seru, Maikeli. "Narikoso, Vunidogoloa Relocation in August." July 19, 2013), Narikoso was in a state of urgency to relocate since "the villagers reported that their lives were at risk because of the rising sea level." This same article stated that the relocation was planned for the following month. *The Fiji Times* (Moceituba, Atasa. "Climate Impacts." June 26, 2015), quoted Ministry of Foreign Affairs permanent secretary, Luke Daunivalu, as saying Narikoso was one of three state sponsored relocations that has already taken place. Yet, the most recent story indicates that GIZ has finally secured 700 thousand Euros for the relocation of seven households in a demarcated *red zone* in Narikoso (Susu, Aqela. "$1.6m Relocation Plan for Seven Households." *Fiji Times,* October 5, 2016).

Adding to the inconsistencies was the fact that in Suva people had continuously referenced the Narikoso pilot project at conference presentations, in casual conversations, and formal interviews with government workers and scholars. Verbal communication from external stakeholders had a consistent story of success. Humanitarian and government workers were vocal about the successes of Narikoso, juxtaposing it with

Vunidogoloa. Even with all the praise that Vunidogoloa received from *some* interviewees, those individuals still acknowledged that it could have been better. This was not the case with Narikoso, which was universally depicted as the poster child for all future relocations. As one interviewee had stated in reference to the Kadavuan village, "This is the way relocation should be done." Because of its apparent successes, there was also said to be proper documentation of the Narikoso relocation. Both of these statements were inaccurate, identifying a communication breakdown. Not only were there no written records of Narikoso's relocation process, but there were also controversial components to the relocation that I further discuss in this chapter.

Above I describe the portrayal of the relocation, and the contention around the role government played in making the decision to relocate the village. I discuss the diverging versions of how relocation was brought up as an adaptable solution to rising sea levels. I describe the consistent nature of inconsistent media accounts about the progress of Narikoso's relocation. The following section delves into an actual account of the relocation at the time of my fieldwork in November 2015. My interviews with villagers, government officials, and mere observations unveiled how the representation of Narikoso's relocation diverged from what was *not* happening in the village.

## 4.3 Just Go with It

"Here's my advice for the village. You have to just go with it.

If you don't you'll end up isolating yourself."

—Advice on how to acclimate to village life

Since 2012, the government had not taken an active role in moving forward with the relocation. When I arrived in Narikoso in November of 2015, the relocation was at a standstill. It had been over three years since the military came to excavate the new site. By this point, the community had expressed fatigue from hosting government workers who were still conducting surveys, but were not delivering any results in regard to the relocation.

Government inaction coupled with a nonexistent timeline created discontentment and frustration throughout the village. Villagers regularly commented, "We just want to move already," and "I don't care what the houses look like." When I asked people when they were going to move, I was usually met with blank stares. I sensed that this was not because of apathy, but because of a failure of the government to provide the village with a detailed outline of the process. Another source of aggravation involved not having any contact information, so they could not inquire about the relocation. Instead, similar to the Vunidogoloa relocation, there were a handful of villagers who were active participants. Only a few villagers were communicating with government workers, while the majority of the community was omitted from the process. This organizational model was a product of tradition, and an outcome of how the relocation process is structured.

Traditional hierarchy favors the opinion of village leaders over the masses. As one young Narikoso woman in her 20s pointed out, "In communities like these, it doesn't

matter what we want. All that matters is what they [village leaders] want." The tone she used was telling, it was as if she was saying, "That's just the way it is." This sentiment works as a justification to exclude people from local decision-making, deviating from the guidelines, which call for 100 percent consensus from the village before relocation proceeds.

In addition to traditional decision-making processes, the relocation was organized in a particular way where only certain people were interacting with government workers. These individuals act as representatives for the community. Villagers maintained that when the community reps went to Suva to meet with officials regarding relocation they were not bringing back any information for the rest of the village. Others felt that their questions were not being answered at village meetings when they inquired about updates concerning the relocation. Some were frustrated that if they had any questions for the government workers, they had to ask the reps, rather than ask government officials directly. This organizational structure parallels a government worker's comment about the role of the Turaga Ni Koro in correlation to the functionality of the village. If the Turani is active the community flourishes, but if they are lazy, the community suffers. Similarly, the success and fluidity of relocation is contingent on village leadership. In this case, the consequence of concentrating power into the hands of a select few resulted in ambiguity and frustration for the majority of the villagers, men and women included.

The community was not alone in their confusion about the relocation of Narikoso. I myself had expected the process to be further along, given that the relocation "started" in 2012. When I arrived, I saw, as one villager so eloquently stated, "There's not much of a process going on." Narikoso's depiction did not provide an adequate representation of

what was occurring. This posed the question: How can there be such a drastic communication breakdown between the village and the government representatives?

I briefly alluded to fragmented communication earlier in this section by referencing a structure of representation that does not equally inform villagers. This organizational model confined privileged information about the relocation to villagers who acted as gatekeepers. In addition, every group of actors had a different account of the relocation. It was as if all the stakeholders were only speaking to other stakeholders, villagers communicated with other villagers, and journalists only talked to other journalists. It is difficult to confidently distinguish between this being an intentional misrepresentation or an unintended consequence of a predominately oral culture.

In general, Fiji and most of the Pacific Islands are oral cultures (Janif et al. 2016). Social life consists of people telling stories in talanoa sessions around the kava bowl. Village leaders, including the elders and Chief, reference their memories when talking about their forefathers, the changes they have witnessed throughout the years, religion, and tribal warfare. A popular pastime involves telling stories about the famous *gifts* of other islanders. For example, the island of Beqa is home to the firewalkers who inherited their gift from an ancestor who was given “power over fire” from a spirit god pleading for its life. Villagers in the Lau group have the gift of song in which they sing, enchanting sea creatures out of the ocean to dance for them.

Talanoa sessions, especially about village life, serve multiple functions including a space to hand down traditional stories, socialize, and share information about their local environment. This is especially true with village elders who hold an abundance of knowledge about the medicinal services of local fauna, and the spawning period of

different fish.

The oral characteristics of knowledge sharing also has its limitations. With oral traditions being replaced by written form, there is less inclination to perform storytelling. As a consequence, stories are disappearing, or only existing in fragmented pieces (Janiff et al. 2016). This, in conjunction with a globalized trend towards what Shaiza Janiffet al. (2016) refer to as "literacy-dependent technologies" such as cellphones and the internet is leading to further erosion of oral cultures. Elders often blame these *modernities* as contributing to a disinterested younger generation that does not want to listen or learn about "traditional knowledge." Since these narratives and knowledge often only exist in the memories of the elders, islanders worry that oral histories will die off with the elderly. Because of this concern, there is a push to physically document these stories ensuring ongoing knowledge production. This was evident during the time of my fieldwork, in which government workers and scholars were casually discussing a government effort to physically document the histories and narratives of Fijian villages.

Although this was only discussed in government, there was a trend at University of the South Pacific to record the traditional knowledge of village elders. Specifically, scholars in the region were interested in how traditional knowledge could inform climate change adaptations. This general push towards written form was also evident in bureaucratic structures. In which there was a push to start documenting government processes including the relocation of Narikoso.

Fijian verbal culture extends beyond social life, and is embedded in formal institutional structures. Unlike mainstream conceptions of reports and records in bureaucratic structures, Fijian governance systems often operate outside of physical

documentation. This was a major concern with the relocations. As government workers reiterated to me during interviews, nothing about the relocation processes was written down. Some saw this as a disservice to future relocations, as one interviewee maintained in reference to Vunidogoloa, "The failures of this project should be documented and seen as strengths." Similar to the broader concern of the need for documentation, stakeholders all mentioned the need for a written process. As one person pointed out, "There needs to be some written agreement with the community and the government before moving them." For the interviewees, a lack of record keeping was the reason for the misinformation that was circulating. A lack of documentation can obviously lead to inaccurate depictions since people are unable to precisely relay a complex story via word of mouth from start to finish. Without record keeping it is impossible to verify who said what, who did not fulfill their duties, and what was supposed to be done in regard to the relocation.

However, interviews also unveiled a trend of dishonesty with funded projects. While some miscommunication is unintentional, external stakeholders and scholars also spoke of intentionality with funded projects being misrepresented. Numerous people mentioned that throughout the South Pacific, it is not uncommon for workers to fabricate the outcome of local projects. This was explained to me through a casual conversation about water tanks in the countryside.

I asked a University of the South Pacific scholar who worked with various organizations, "Why are there so many empty water tanks in the villages, and especially in drought prone areas?" His response had multiple dimensions. First, he maintained that water tanks are often the "go to" for environmental adaptations because they are cheap.

For example, Fiji may receive a 1 million Fiji dollar grant for climate change adaptation from the European Union. This money is to be dispersed amongst a couple dozen villages. Initially, 1 million dollars sounds like a generous amount for the region. After institutional costs associated with the grant, and partitioning off the funds, each village ends up with approximately 10-15 thousand Fiji dollars. The interviewee's reference to financial limitations illustrates the barriers to costly adaptation measures, alongside the obligation to provide assistance. As he maintained, providing a community with a water tank is better than doing nothing.

The second part of his answer further addresses the decoupling between projects and their necessity. His explanation was twofold: (1) the government's reliance on outside funding, and (2) the role of the project manager. Fiji's developing country status means that government assistance to its population is often contingent on international funding. As mentioned in the Introduction, scholars and government workers expressed frustration that external funding around climate change is dictating national level priorities. This same sentiment is applicable to the reported outcomes of funded projects. People fear that if a project does not have a favorable outcome, the funding agency will discontinue future grants. This indirectly relates to relocation since government officials note that all future relocations will have to be funded by international donor agencies. In an effort to attract grants these relocations have to appear necessary, organized, and successful.

In the second part of their answer, the scholar referenced the role of the project manager. This person is the liaison between the community and the funding agency. If the project fails, it is perceived as the project manager's failure. Consequently, people

will often report *failed* projects as *successes* believing that it will protect their individual jobs. As a result of blueprinting and false reports, failures become embedded in institutional practices.

A simplistic analysis of the above scenario identifies the individuals' actions as the reason for organizational failures. However, these individuals work within a bureaucracy, so it is important to look at how organizations influence and control individuals. Max Weber's (1968) work on bureaucracies maintains that bureaucratic organization is unique to the "modern era." Embedded in these institutions is the taken-for-granted assumption that bureaucracies are rational and efficient. This logic works as a force to legitimize organizational power and control. Although it appears that people have agency, Weber (1968) argues that bureaucracy puts people in an iron cage of rationality by dominating social life. They inhibit individual innovation in the name of efficiency, forcing people to work within the confines of the organization. Moreover, bureaucracies have one goal: sustain the bureaucracy. Similar to any social structure, its survival is contingent on its ability to portray *success*. Thus, individuals confined to the structure are forced to engage in activities that give this image. Unfortunately, the stigma against *failure* in organizational settings leads to inertia. To quote the wise Dr. Robbins from Tom Robbins's *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1976:54), "Embrace failure! Seek it out. Learn to love it. That may be the only way any of us will ever be free."

## 4.4 Stay Positive

"Critical thinking isn't considered positive."

—Conversation about the overwhelming need to stay positive

The more interesting phenomenon in Narikoso focuses on the breakdown of communication *within* the village. Why does the village not know what is going on? Is it all *un*intentional miscommunication? Is it all a product of the organizational structure with village representatives? My stay in the village and interviews with government workers allows me to examine why people were *misinformed*.

To my luck and my disadvantage, I visited Narikoso when the village was hosting a number of visitors. Had national government and NGO workers not been there to clarify some misconceptions, I would have no idea what was happening with the relocation. Their presence also acted as a detriment. People were skeptical of me, thinking I was with the Fijian government. Since households had visitors, and government workers were at the village, I decided to postpone my interviews until all outsiders left. This established more trust with the community, and it showed people that, contrary to what they believed, I was not with the government.

During the time of my fieldwork, Narikoso villagers living in Suva were visiting the community to be part of a *soli* (fundraiser). There was also a government and regional NGO presence to conduct a cost-benefit analysis to document the indirect and direct costs of the relocation. As mentioned in the final document, "Narikoso Relocation Project: Cost Benefit Analysis Update Note" (Joliffe, January 28, 2016), the Climate Change Division solicited assistance from the Secretariat of the Pacific (SPC) to identify economic values associated with the relocation process. The primary purpose of the note

was to determine whether or not the benefits associated with relocation outweigh the costs. In addition, the note served as a supplemental document for the solicitation of funding from GIZ.

Although the government was still searching for funding, villagers were under the impression that financial barriers had been met in that the Fiji government had secured funding to assist with the relocation. Interviewees unanimously stated that a government worker came to Narikoso informing the community there was a budget of 1.2 million Euros for the relocation. They proceeded to explain that the government just needed to send soldiers to start constructing the houses. Furthermore, no one understood why this had not happened yet.

Through my correspondence with external stakeholders, I knew the villagers were *misinformed* and there was no availability of funds to continue forward with the relocation. After the military excavated the new site in 2012, the government ran out of money for the relocation. Since then, the government had been in search of external funds to continue with the project. However, the Climate Change Division's first proposal to GIZ for funding was denied. The fact that the cost-benefit analysis was being conducted at the time of my fieldwork indicated that, by November 2015, there were no available funds to relocate Narikoso.

When I asked local and national government workers, "The community says there are funds available, why do they think this?" Answers varied. Some stated, "They are just misinformed." Others informed me that the community was "lied" to during an official government visit. I further inquired about the "lie," curious as to why no one was clarifying to the community that there were no available funds and construction would

not start until this financial barrier was overcome. Again, I was met with a number of responses. A common one being, “I didn’t tell them that,” signifying it was not the interviewee’s responsibility to correct another person’s falsification. Another individual maintained that the village is aware that funding for the relocation is unavailable, but they are convinced otherwise. Some ignored my question altogether, and chose to remain silent. However, one stakeholder alluded to a cultural understanding surrounding “lies” stating, “In Fiji it is better to lie than to demoralize.” This comment points to the notion that this specific scenario is not an isolated incident, but works as part of a larger cultural script (Goffman 1959).

As someone pointed out to me during my first week in Fiji, if you tell people, “No,” it is perceived as rude. The polite decline is, “Vinaka,” which translates to thank you. Another acceptable alternative is to “alter the truth” by telling people what you think they may want to hear. Despite all the approaches available, one will never hear, “No” or “I don’t know” as a response. Literature substantiates this observation as a historical trend. Cyril Belshaw’s (1964:482) study on society in rural Fiji identifies an unwillingness to criticize others. The author argues that this was changing, but for the most part,

> Someone maybe responsible for a critical breakdown in communication, either deliberately or by default, but his responsibility will not be brought home to him. Other individuals will not accuse him to his face; the administration, figuratively speaking, shrugs its shoulder instead of conducting an enquiry.

This brief linguistic analysis highlights how, in general, Fijian circles are concerned with expressing positivity and minimizing criticism or conflict.

From this perspective, the government worker was not lying to the village, but enacting a cultural script. According to Erving Goffman (1959:35), “When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify

the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole." In this regard, the less visible dimension of the spread of misinformation was the intention of keeping up community morale. The government worker was not lying, but putting on an idealized performance that maintained positivity for the village. They were merely acting upon the activities of "impression management" to give a favorable image that resonates with the goal of relocation (Goffman 1959). In this case, the relocation will continue, and the biggest obstacle, being finances, have already been allocated.

Morality varies across cultures, whether it is perspectives on infidelity, consumption of meat, the use of racial epithets, or gambling practices. Clifford Geertz's (1972) famous essay on Balinese cockfights draws on Goffman's theoretical framework of symbolic interaction. Geertz (1972) illustrates how cockfighting is an expressive cultural interpretation. As he points out, a cockfight is not just about gambling. It is a "simulation of the social matrix, the involved system of crosscutting, overlapping, highly corporate groups—villages, kingroups, irrigation societies, temple congregations, 'castes'—in which devotees live" (Geertz 1972:74). In Bali, cockfighting is illegal, in other places it is perceived as inhumane. However, Geertz points out how this act is a representation of Balinese social stratification. Similar to the act of "lying" in Fiji, cockfighting in Bali is a symbolic performance that aligns itself with the broader values of society. The major contribution of Geertz's analysis is that he goes beyond judgments of individual actions, but seeks to understand the cultural context of which this activity takes place.

Similarly, this analysis is not meant to reprimand the person for the "lie." It is an attempt to understand the pervasive cultural climate of optimism. However, the *lie*,

similar to Balinese cockfighting, needs to be understood as a symbol that takes place within a specific cultural context. It is thus a ritualized action. While this act may have had the best of intentions, it also had consequences. A lack of progress towards the relocation, coupled with fabrications, resulted in further breakdown of trust in the government.

## 4.5 Are You Here with the Government?

"You're still here. They [village] thought you were one of the government workers' girlfriend." "Really? Which one?"

–Being in the village at the same time as the Fiji government

Throughout the islands, villagers would speak of the government promising assistance with development projects, but never returning. Some communities took this trend as rationale for them to execute full autonomy, arguing that the government was unreliable. Other communities waited with half-finished projects or ongoing village "problems," in the hopes that the government would return as they said they would. Such was the case in Narikoso. There was a lack of freshwater in the village since earlier that year (2015). The taps throughout the village would turn on, trickling water for a couple hours throughout the day, in which people would *slowly* fill a bucket with water. Households with a boat were able to go to Mai Dive, the neighboring resort that employed a few villagers, to collect large tanks of water. When I inquired about the water shortage in the village, I was told that it was not water scarcity, but inadequate water pressure to bring water to the taps.

The government came to the village eight months prior to my stay, and installed

two water tanks placing them side-by-side rather than one above the other. Due to a lack of pressure, water was not traveling from the uppermost tank and through the pipes. Some men in the village asserted that they could fix this on their own, and proposed to the other men purchasing supplies from Suva, moving the tanks, and fixing the “water shortage.” The proactive village men expressed frustration that the common response from others was that the government would come back to fix it. They were irritated, remaining skeptical that the government would return, and their village would continue to have no water. Those who wanted to take initiative could not, without financial and labor assistance from the other men in the village.

The consequence of unfulfilled government promises affected Narikoso village in complex ways. Villagers had two choices in how they could respond: (1) they could execute agency and attempt to fix the pipes on their own, or (2) they could wait for assistance from the government. The first response illustrates how communities execute their autonomy over village development because of distrust in government promises. The latter illustrates how village “problems” continue because of uncertainty regarding the government’s position.

Similar to the response to the water tanks, Narikoso villagers chose to wait for government assistance to relocate the community. When I asked the villagers if they had considered moving prior to the Prime Minister’s visit, those only in the *red zone* (the 15 houses closest to the shoreline which were being inundated) said, “Yes.” A few people cited financial constraints as to why they did not move. Some were in the process of moving but stopped when the government said they would intervene. Others were concerned that moving the one mataqali in the red zone would fragment the community.

Prior to the promise of government intervention, people were willing to move on their own because as they stated, "We have no choice." Yet, the promise of government assistance created hesitancy for villagers to move. External assistance would alleviate household fiscal pressures associated with moving, so the benefit of waiting for the government outweighed the financial costs of houses moving on their own.

Contrary to government perception of dependency, villagers often perceive themselves as autonomous. As one villager argued, if the government does not plan on assisting with the relocation they would like to know, so they as a community can continue to work towards moving the whole village (Interview Exchange). The interviewee's comment illustrates a common theme that emerged from most interviews. While cases of dependency exist, most villagers see themselves as capable of executing their own mobility, as they have in the past. In addition, the onset of relocation as a national agenda emerged from the government. Initially, community members were not concerned with financial assistance, but wanted to ensure they were moving within their demarcated boundaries. The government took it upon themselves to intervene in village mobility efforts. If government intervention with relocation would alleviate individual household fiscal pressures, what would be the incentive for a community to decline assistance?

Islanders throughout Kadavu also started to speculate about government corruption. For villagers, there was no reason the building should not have started. The community was told from someone they perceived as a credible figure that there were funds. Others *knew* there were funds because they read it in the paper and heard it on the radio. In a *Fiji Sun* article (Seru, Maikeli. "Narikoso, Vunidogoloa Relocation in August." July 19,

2013), it was printed that Narikoso would relocate the following month. This does not state explicitly that there are funds, but it implies that the relocation will proceed. With no reason the relocation should not be ongoing, individuals in the region started to speculate that the government was siphoning funds from Narikoso. This was not unique to Kadavu, as people often wondered aloud if the government was making money off the communities that need to relocate.

Rumors of government corruption flooded the discourse on relocation. I refer to this as a rumor because it could not be verified (DiFonzo 2008; Shibutani 1966). Contrary to psychological understandings of rumors, sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani (1966:15) sees rumors as a collective process independent of an individual person, comparing it to a lynching mob in which "once a rumor is under way, it cannot be controlled by any one of the participants." There are varying perspectives on the formation of rumors, but the consensus within the literature is "the basic unit of analysis becomes the *ambiguous situation*" (Shibutani 1966:23). For Shibutani (1966:57), the *ambiguous situation* leads to his primary hypothesis, "If the demand for news in a public exceeds the supply made available through institutional channels, rumor construction is likely to occur." Although he points out that rumors are not inevitable, they occur with high probability when people are seeking answers but are only being provided with partial information. In essence, rumors act as a coping mechanism for collectivities to make sense of reality during times of uncertainty. With a lack of progress and no information about the subsequent process of Narikoso, islanders in Kadavu are left with one option, rumor creation.

Of all the speculations that can unveil, why do people point to political corruption?

Essentially the community was focusing on the *known facts* and a social context of already established familiarity. For the community, the known facts were (1) money was available for the relocation, but (2) there was no timeline. The social context is situated in a broader climate of political distrust with an established trend of unfulfilled promises, unreliability, and a lack of government accountability.

The Narikoso relocation, along with its ambiguities, is impossible to analyze outside of a cultural and political context. As previously mentioned, I cannot confidently say that Narikoso's inaccurate depictions are intentional and malevolent. Regardless of intent, there are consequences to the ambiguities and fabrications, including rumors of corruption, erosion of trust in the government, and hesitancy from the community to execute agency over their lives. It is too early to tell the possible repercussions from these unintended consequences. Any future predictions would be merely speculative. However, there are some known facts associated with the relocation. The most visible being the environmental degradation of Ono Island caused by the technical process of relocation. In addition to environmental costs, there are social costs to the livelihoods of villagers.

## 4.6 Blow It Up

"I don't understand. Why would they do that?" "That's what the military does."

–Conversation about the military

The U.S. conservative movement and its think tanks deny the anthropogenic nature of climate change, but scientists and majority of the world's national leaders agree that human activity is the primary driver of our warming planet (McRight and Dunlap 2000). It is also evident that climate change clearly represents unequal ecological exchange, with

developed countries emitting a disproportionate amount of carbon emissions and less developed countries acting as the "sink capacity" (Hornborg 1998). Moreover, lesser-developed countries' economic status and social vulnerability contributes to more visible consequences caused by climate change relative to their wealthier counterparts (Roberts and Parks 2007). Given the human-induced nature and inequality of climate change, it is paradoxical that the solution to relocate *environmental refugees* led to further environmental degradation on Ono Island.

Prime Minister Bainimarama used the military to assist with the technical component of the relocation. Within months of visiting the community, he sent the Army to start excavation of the new site without first conducting an environmental assessment. Due to the remoteness of Ono Island, the government transported excavators and bulldozers from Suva via cargo ships. Docking the ship resulted in extensive damage to the Great Astrolabe Reef that encompasses most of Kadavu and Ono. Soldiers then cut down mangroves in order to get the equipment on the island. Finally, the military personnel dynamited the mountain to level the new site.

After realizing their major faux pas, the government sent in the Ministry of Minerals and Resources to survey the area. By this point, the ecological damage was done and approximately 200 thousand Fiji dollars was wasted on the blunder. Their assessment showed, similar to Vunidogoloa, the sediment was not solid enough to build on. Furthermore, of the three bluffs that were created, the top bluff is unstable, and the bottom two can hold eight houses total. However, since Cyclone Winston, a government initiative has been proposed to not allow any building within a certain distance of the shore (Interview Exchange). This means that more land has to be cleared. Moreover, the

demolition of the mountain has caused soil erosion, leading to muddying of the shoreline affecting the fish stock in the existing mangroves.

The Ministry of Minerals and Resources has made a number of attempts to rectify the environmental degradation generated from the relocation process. The government came back to Ono to replant mangroves, but the current was too strong, and uprooted the seedlings. They also planted vetiver grass to curb soil erosion caused from dynamiting the bluffs. However, by the time these measures were taken to mitigate the damage, the social and environmental consequences had already impacted the community.

The relocation process of Narikoso poses a distinct question, why? The government approach to relocating the community extends beyond paradoxical to asinine. What is the logic behind destroying the mangroves? Mangroves provide one of the most valuable ecosystem services to coastal communities by acting as a natural barrier to coastal erosion. What is the logic behind blowing up the mountain without conducting an environmental assessment? Past experiences with Vunidogoloa illustrate how improper planning destroys the local environment and wastes financial resources. What is the logic behind using the military to assist with an environmental issue? As stakeholders pointed out, the military is not meant to produce environmental adaptations. Their purpose is to "blow it up." Yet, Bainimarama as former commander in the military himself, he was said to use the military for everything (Interview Exchange). This was a characteristic of postcoup Fiji, which reflects the shifting role of the military in Fijian politics.

Fijians often take pride in their military, because soldiers often serve peacekeeping missions throughout the world (Ratuva 2011). Paradoxically, the military has also played an active role in taking over the country in a number of military coups, the most recent

being 2006. Prior to the coup, the military perceived itself as an unbiased "political watchdog" intended to serve as a check to political corruption. After the coup, the military became conflated with the state to the degree that Bainimarama was often described as a military dictator. As a result, it took a more active institutional role.

Throughout this dissertation, I have posed the question: What is the purpose of relocation? The paradoxical outcome in Narikoso illustrates one possible answer to this question. The driving logic behind relocation is a technical solution to move communities out of vulnerable situations. By focusing on policies that identify geographically vulnerable communities and the most efficient way to remove them from "imminent danger" shifts the debate from ethical considerations to economic and technological innovation. The conversation about rising sea levels caused by climate change is no longer about mitigation and questions of equity, rights to place, and the need for an ecological revolution. The conversation about rising sea levels is now about technical adaptations. Specifically, how do we move people out of vulnerable situations?

It would be unfair to give the illusion that the Narikoso relocation is completely devoid of any environmental concern. Initially, yes, no attention was paid to possible environmental ramifications caused from the technical process. When the government ran out of money, they solicited assistance from the regional NGO, SPC, and the German INGO, GIZ. From here, consideration about the environmental and social costs of relocation was addressed.

The cost-benefit analysis produced by SPC includes environmental costs. However, unlike tangible processes associated with excavation and construction, economics is unable to accurately account for ecological costs (York, Clark, and Foster 2009). Without

the ability to assign monetary values to environmental dimensions, the "expected magnitude" associated with the environment is identified as either high (meaning large monetary costs), medium, or low (indicating little monetary cost). The SPC report classifies environmental costs, all of which are identified as "low," as the removal of mangroves and coastal plants and the clearing of land (Joliffe 2016).

Although stakeholders acknowledge ecological costs, their inability to commodify ecosystem services is not surprising. As Richard York, Brett Clark, and John Bellamy Foster (2009:11) point out, neoclassical economics is restricted by "ecological blinders" which exclude the natural world only seeing it "simply in terms of an endless, enlarging 'circular flow' of economic relations." The cost-benefit analysis clearly illustrates economics' ecological blinders by the fact that the report only attempts to quantify ecological costs in categorical terms.

Rachel Carson's (1962) *Silent Spring* parallels the Narikoso relocation by showing how grave environmental degradation occurred in the sagelands of Wyoming. Carson wrote *Silent Spring* over 50 years ago, but her portrayal of society's relationship to nature is still relevant. Without stating it explicitly she alludes to the concept of "ecological blinders," in which humanity's overarching need to control nature creates unintended social and ecological consequences. She articulated this in her influential piece that speaks about the impacts of synthetic chemicals for human bodies, waterways, birds, fish, and reptiles. In her work, she makes it known that technological processes employed as a means to manage nature often contradict symbiotic natural systems.

Her book is best known for its exposure of the impacts of DDT, but she generally speaks about humanity's perception of the natural world—that humans have domination

over nature. However, people fail to recognize that society relies on the ecosystem and its services for sheer survival. By interfering with the ecosystem, we create unintended consequences, which often works against our best interest. Carson (1962:67) identifies this as the "shotgun approach to nature," which is exemplified in the U.S. Forest Service's attempt to clear sagelands from Wyoming. In eradicating sage, they also killed the willows that the moose and beaver fed on. One year after spraying the sagelands, the delicacies of the ecosystem were exposed. The sage was gone. The willow was gone. The beavers and moose were gone. The dams, architected by the beavers, were gone. The lake was dried up. The large trout were gone. "The living world was shattered" (Carson 1962:68).

Carson was not naïve in her approach to the environment. She acknowledged that at times society has to disturb natural relationships. Yet, the majority of these disruptions are unnecessary with no consideration of the long-term impacts, as is shown with the aforementioned example. The sage was the target, but what was the sin of the willow? According to Carson (1962:64), "Many [plants] are marked for destruction merely because, according to our narrow view, they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time." Her reflections provide important insights regarding the Fijian military's approach to destroying the mangroves and the coral reef. From an objective perspective, the mangroves, along with the reef, are working on the same team as the relocation initiative. They are serving the same purpose—to protect the community from coastal erosion. According to an anthropocentric view, the mangroves and the reef were "in the wrong place at the wrong time."

The shotgun approach to prepping the new site has already transformed the local

environment generating social and ecological consequences for the community. After almost four years, the community has seen a visible decrease in the fish stock as a result of habitat destruction caused by damage to the coral reef, soil erosion, and mangrove removal. The depletion of the fish stock is problematic for the villagers, considering fish is their primary source of protein. At the same time, it is one of their sources of economic revenue. The preparation of the new site also illustrates Barry Commoner's (1971) first law of ecology: in nature everything is connected to everything else. As he and Carson articulated in their work, the ecosystem functions with a set of delicate, complex, and symbiotic relationships. When humans interfere with these relationships, society risks ecological collapse.

It would be easy to blame the soldiers for the ecological degradation. Under the order of Bainimarama, the military removed the mangroves, dynamited the mountain, and destroyed the coral reef. When I inquired about Narikoso's environmental degradation, and the role of the military, interviewees were unanimously sympathetic to the actions of the soldiers. As one government worker pointed out, "The military was used for everything, and they were just following instructions." The ecological degradation generated from the relocation process is not the result of the military's actions, it is the result of the ideological driver of relocation—clear the land and move the village. As Carson pointed out over 50 years ago, technical fixes rarely take into consideration ecological systems. Thus, the result is a string of unanticipated social and ecological consequences that are difficult to undo.

## 4.7 Tomorrow…

"The boat's not coming today. It'll be here tomorrow. Maybe."

"What do you mean? You're lying to me." "No, I'm not. A boat sunk in the harbor yesterday, so they had to reroute. It might come today. You can go to the dock and wait."

"So, I'm here for another day?" "Yes." *Screams*

–Conversation about island fever

Visiting Narikoso was critical for my interviews with stakeholders. It allowed me to follow up with people in Suva and ask specific questions about Narikoso's relocation and its areas of contention including the availability of funding, ecological degradation, and when the government planned on moving forward with building. Not everyone was open about the inconsistencies regarding funds and the building timeline because these subjects could not be portrayed in a positive light. Because of this, some people chose to remain silent when I asked questions about why the community was told there were funds when there was actually no money to proceed with the relocation. Other interviewees were more open about the problematic characteristics of the village's relocation efforts because there was no longer a veil of secrecy around the community. While some were more forthcoming than others, as one individual said, "It's a disaster."

Stakeholders who were aware of Narikoso's problematic characteristics, expressed concern about how it would impact the general discourse. An external stakeholder discussed Narikoso in relation to relocation, in general, highlighting how they were initially a proponent of the national relocation guidelines *under the assumption* that a specific protocol would prevent government workers from making false promises to communities. After seeing Narikoso, the interviewee maintained that they no longer

agreed with national guidelines because of the way relocation was being carried out, and how it was being treated as the first option rather than the last. The interviewee continued, explaining that when a policy is created it will be an appropriate option, but it should not be an option until the relocations are employed properly.

Considering Narikoso was technically still relocating, some people were hesitant to offer insight as to how relocations may be more efficient, fearing it would further delay their village's process. Ensuring that the response to this question had no authority over their relocation, they opted for more transparency and consistent updates. Villagers stated that it would benefit other communities to know specific timelines before the "process" started. This means key dates as to when the site will be cleared, when construction will start, access to the layout of the new site, the plans for the houses, and when they will be able to move. In addition, they felt as if having a designated contact person who oversees the project from start to finish would ensure that each individual could ask the questions they want to and receive answers. By doing so it would alleviate any confusion on the community's part and allow individual households to better prepare for the future.

What is the status of Narikoso's relocation since those two weeks in November? When I left Fiji in April 2016, there was still no funding secured for the relocation. I inquired about this through correspondence with an active participant in the Narikoso relocation. I was told, "You'll probably know when they move before I do." Since this exchange, external stakeholders have received new contracts for other jobs and villagers have changed numbers.

I rely on the *Fiji Times* and *Fiji Sun* to stay updated on Narikoso's relocation effort. The source's reliability is questionable, but as of October 5, 2016, the *Fiji Times* (Susu,

Aqela. "$1.6m Relocation Plan for Seven Households") reports, "Seven households at Narikoso Village on Ono in Kadavu will soon be relocated because of threats of climate change on their homes." The article continues, "A total of 1.2 million Euros [from GIZ] have been set aside for this. Out of this 700,000 Euros will be for the relocation of the seven households who were situated in the red zones and needed to be relocated as quickly as possible."

This chapter focused on the organizing principles of the Narikoso relocation. I drew some parallels to Vunidogoloa, specifically how the public representation of the project differed from the actual outcomes. I also showed the possible diversity of consequences in regards to relocation. Although both villages were assisted by the national government, the obstacles and shortcomings each community faced were different. Narikoso's remote relocation, coupled with the ideological driver of relocation as a technical fix, resulted in irreparable environmental degradation. In addition, a drastic communication breakdown embedded in a larger social context of positivity resulted in rumors of government corruption and mistrust. In the next chapter, I pay attention to the particularities of the Narikoso relocation with respect to development, ideology, and religion.

# CHAPTER 5

# DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM, AND RELIGION IN NARIKOSO

## 5.1 Introduction

Contrary to the beliefs about homogeneity, the Fiji Islands are diverse in terms of economic development and infrastructural services. A range of economic activities including farming, wage labor, tourism, and fishing are some of the limited opportunities for locals to earn an income (Bayliss-Smith et al. 1988; Sofer 2015). Although there are a number of economies, Fiji's status as a developing country seems to be its defining characteristic when it comes to understanding its economic status. Identifying Fiji as a developing country ignores the fact there is vast intraregional inequality and uneven development, primarily between the main island of Viti Levu and the outer islands, which is the case between Suva and Kadavu.

Kadavu's connection to Suva mimics core-periphery relationships as discussed by world systems theorists (Frank 1979; Wallerstein 1974). A common way to analyze the interaction between the main island and the outer islands is through dependency theory (Amin 1976), which focuses on unequal exchange wrought on by capitalist modes of production. Unlike modernization theory (Rostow 1960), which posits a linear development model that follows a specific set of transitions from a traditional to modern society, dependency theorists argue that historical events can either provide opportunities

or drawbacks to the development of a society (Frank 1979). While modernization theorists see a lack of development as a result of endogenous factors including corruption or "backwardness," dependency theorists see *under*development as a product of exogenous forces (Frank 1979; Wallerstein 1974). Specifically, underdevelopment is *produced* by capitalism's monopolistic nature and metropolis-satellite structure (Frank 1979). This model permits the metropolis to appropriate economic surplus from the satellite to fuel its own development while contributing to the exploitation of the satellite through structural processes of unequal exchange (Frank 1979; Wallerstein 1974). Thus, the so-called trap of underdevelopment is not an unintended consequence of neoliberalism and colonialism, but a consequence of the very processes associated with capitalist development, which ensures the hegemony of the metropolis.

In the case of Fiji, colonialism created uneven regional development by forming a metropolis (Suva)-satellite (outer islands) relationship that mimics the larger core-periphery structure (Sofer 2009). Not all elements of dependency theory neatly or accurately reflect the Suva-Kadavu relationship, but there are some parallels. In his study on the peripheralized status of Kadavu, Michael Sofer (2009) finds that Kadavu villages have been left out of the market economy. Sofer (2009:345) argues, "Uneven transformations caused the smaller islands to remain largely outside the immediate sphere of capitalist relations and forces of production but highly dependent on the Fijian core located in Suva, the national capital, as well as on the state subsidies and ideological support for Fijian society." In this context, colonizers established Suva as the hub of capital accumulation while reinforcing underdevelopment in the outer islands. Sofer (2009:345) goes on to define Kadavu in the 1980s as an internal periphery based on the

following characteristics:

(i) administrative decisions were made in the core with minimal local input;
(ii) cash production was determined by external demand and geared towards the cultivation of a major single beverage crop–yaqona (*Piper methysticum*) or the South Pacific kava;
(iii) trade with the core–the sole trade partner– was mediated by non-local middlemen;
(iv) most production was based on semi-subsistence agriculture and local entrepreneurship concerning capitalist production was unheard of; and
(v) there were no significant economic links with other Fijian peripheries and external linkages were based on shipping services provided by Suva.

Despite Sofer's (2009) initial observations being from 1980, he finds that twenty years later Kadavu has remained relatively unchanged. Its remoteness keeps it isolated from decision-making entities in Suva. With no urban center to offer employment, Kadavu islanders rely on subsistence and kava farming as their sole cash crop. Islanders without a boat (which is majority of the island cluster's population) rely on the shipping companies in Suva to get goods back and forth between Kadavu and the main island. Moreover, without access to a boat or capitalist production to purchase a boat ticket, people in the outer islands are more spatially bound to their village. A conversation with a professor at University of the South Pacific elucidated the latter when he told me, "You've probably been to more islands than most Fijians."

The above description indicates the contemporary status of Kadavu. Not much has changed in this area in the last four decades, except for the increase in tourism (Sofer 2009). Statistics indicate a recent growth in the tourism industry; in 2000 tourism in Kadavu generated 1 million Fiji dollars, and by 2004, this increased to 1.9 million Fiji dollars (Sofer 2009). The stagnation of development in the villages coupled with the growth of luxury tourism has created vivid intraregional inequality. For example, most villagers in Narikoso were not part of the labor force, but practice semisubsistence

agriculture as a means to earn an income. Most people did not have access to a boat, but relied on Suva's shipping service to get goods such as flour, kerosene, and sugar. In addition, foreigners are bringing development *into* the remote area of Kadavu, but concentrating it on private islands. Because of this phenomenon, Kadavu uniquely embodies change *and* stagnation.

Residents of Kadavu are not oblivious to the changes or wealth disparity in the region. In addition, people are very conscious of the island owner's and their country of origin, whether it is "one rich American man" or "one rich Australian man." It is never "one rich Fijian man" or "one rich woman." The stories that circulate about the resorts and the owners support the idea that locals are concerned about the gross accumulation of foreign wealth in the region. The issue of economic inequality also raises puzzling questions. Who buys an island? Who has enough money to do so? The people of Kadavu understand wealth in terms of cultural ideologies. Specifically, resort owners are perceived as prosperous because they worship Fiji's ancient gods, while locals receive their prosperity through "luck."

In this chapter, I examine how concepts such as capitalism and climate change are Westernized logics that do not universally represent Kadavu villager's worldviews. Islanders interpret the surrounding wealth disparity and environmental degradation in terms of local cultural frameworks. I begin this chapter by discussing how the islanders of Kadavu interact with neighboring resorts, and how people perceive the broader social problem of economic inequality on the islands. I continue by drawing parallels to the climate change discourse showing that *climate change* is a foreign discourse that does not precisely represent perceptions of environmental degradation. This is an imperfect

retelling of conversations I had with people about Kadavu's wealth extremes and environmental degradation. Finally, I conclude by emphasizing the importance of understanding cultural and religious interpretations of social and ecological concerns. As Western discourses are being disseminated to more remote parts of the world through local political elites and international actors, it is important to understand how foreign discourses compete with and complement cultural understandings of the world. By paying attention solely to narratives and processes associated with climate change and capitalism in the context of development, scholars risk diluting the importance of culture.

## 5.2 *Arne Yadra* (Good Morning)

"We worship Benjamin Franklin."

–Discussion with expat about capitalism

Villagers extend their pride of place to neighboring high-end resorts. For example, prior to visiting Narikoso, I met the village's Development Committee at the National Climate Change Summit. This is where I first heard about Narikoso's relocation and the beauty of the village. Although relocation was an important topic, most villagers spoke about the white sand, how they dove for lobster and crab, daily, and Mai Dive, the neighboring resort. Talking about the physical terrain of villages is not unique to Narikoso villagers. Throughout Fiji, indigenous Fijians from Kadavu exude pride about the beauty of their village. Comments such as, "You know the white sandy beaches? My village has white sandy beaches. My village has a waterfall," are common.

This same degree of pride is extended to the resorts. Kadavu's resorts are talked about with flattery, awe, and mysticism. People have daily conversations about how

foreigners travel from the other side of the world, and pay astronomical amounts of money to visit nearby islands. They talk about the celebrities who visit the resorts, astonished and flattered that the rich and famous would pay exorbitant amounts of money to stay at their islands. Stories about celebrities renting out all the bungalows at six-star resorts for privacy, or helicoptering onto the islands, are spoken about as if they came out of a gossip magazine. While these resorts and the visitors generate flattery and entertainment, they also create economic opportunities for villagers.

Similar to Vanua Levu villages that are within proximity to Savusavu; Kadavu villages benefit from tourism. However, not everyone has access to the economic opportunities that comes with tourism development. For example, an Australian billionaire built a six-star resort and hired all the men from one nearby village as construction workers, resulting in an influx of cash for this community. Islanders throughout the Kadavu cluster were aware of this arrangement. They did not question their neighbor's economic opportunities, but rather described the islanders as "lucky." This explanation extends to other forms of uneven access to economic opportunities.

Villages often describe other villages as "lucky" to be born to the island that is desired by foreigners. This was the case with Dravuni Island, a mataqali owned island, approximately thirty minutes in a fiberglass boat from Narikoso. This small island with a population of about one hundred is a Princess Cruises' destination. The company (princess.com) describes the island as:

> Well-worn trails scattered with coconuts snake around the unspoiled beaches, the soft sands beckoning underwater adventurers towards the crystal-clear waters. Many visitors come to snorkel in the Great Astrolabe Reef, or to hike Dravuni Island's highest peak for magnificent once-in-a-lifetime views of the surrounding islands.

The description provided does not adequately capture the beauty of Dravuni. Upon seeing

the island, it is apparent why the ship docks on the two-mile long island once a month, and twice a month during peak season. However, when they do so, Princess Cruises compensates the village for renting out their beach.

Locals describe the scenery of the beach when the cruise comes as packed with foreigners lying in the sand. Despite wastewater pollution and the emissions that comes along with cruise ships, locals welcome the lucrative income (Johnson 2002; Ritter and Schafer 1998). In addition to the collective income received from Princess Cruises, individual households benefit by selling massages, hair braiding, food, and crafts to the tourists. Throughout Kadavu, people know that if you happen to live on this island, you are financially well off because of the cruise ship, but also because you just happen to be born to the island with the white sandy beach.

A similar explanation of "luck" or "business model" does not extend to understanding foreign accumulation of wealth. Rather, resort owners are believed to worship Fiji's ancient gods as a means to achieve material prosperity. Storytelling during kava sessions identified the ways islanders perceive inequality between foreigners and locals. These narratives act as a way for people to make sense of the visible economic inequality throughout Kadavu.

Majority of indigenous Fijians are Christian, but still believe in the spirit world, respecting and fearing their ancestral gods (McNamara, Norenzayan, and Heinrich 2016; Ryle 2010). Throughout the islands, people tell stories about spirits and the *Kalou-vu* (ancient gods). Mythical stories about ghosts and ancient gods are not unique to the rural areas, but urban centers are also home to notorious ghosts. It is rumored that Suva is filled with spirits that wander the docks late at night. The popular Suva nightclub, Bali

Hai, is home to a beautiful ghost that enchants men, enticing them back to the cemetery where she drinks with them on her grave until they pass out. In the morning the men wander home, confused as to how they ended up in the cemetery. Similar to most cultures, stories like the ones about spirits and ancient gods are a form of entertainment and folklore, but in Fiji they serve a dual purpose acting as warnings and lessons on how to behave (Ryle 2010).

For Fijians, the ancestral gods are neutral, but kava offerings can persuade them to use their *mana* (power) for good or evil (Ryle 2010). While contemporary kava drinking has come to dominate social life, it was originally intended to "open a conduit to the world of non-Christian spirits" (Tomlinson 2007:1066). The historical legacy of kava drinking extends to the present day, but to use it as an offering is taboo. Fijian villagers accused of worshipping ancient gods, which were coined *false gods* by the Christian missionaries, are socially sanctioned, and, in some cases, banished from their village. Similarly, resort owners are believed to use kava as an offering to the ancient gods, however, since they operate outside of traditional rural Fijian society, they are not held to the same standards. Therefore, it did not appear that these speculations had negatively affected resort owners, other than enticing gossip around the islands.

In the accounts of resort owners worshipping ancestral gods, a Serpent God is the most pervasive. The god was never named, however, its description as a snake with a diamond on its head aligns with the Fijian god, Degei. As the creator of Fiji, Degei is the most important god in Fijian folklore (Parke 2014). I am unsure as to if the god described was Degei because according to Fijian mythology it lives in a cave in the Yasawa Islands located to the northwest of Viti Levu, whereas Kadavu is on the southeast of the main

island. Also, to reiterate from the Introduction, the main limitation of an oral culture is that complex narratives only exist in the minds of people leading to inconsistencies and shifts in stories. Nonetheless, I was intrigued by the story of the snake god.

I asked a young woman about the resort owners worshipping the snake god, curious as to how the god manifested itself to them. She explained the traditional use of kava as an offering to the gods. In her telling of the narrative, people conjured up the snake god by throwing a bowl of kava into the ocean. Upon which a giant snake with a diamond on its head wriggles from the sea saying, "Arne Yadra" (Good Morning). According to the story, the snake god will grant the person who made the kava offering a wish in return for their soul. I then asked the woman, "What do people ask for?" She replied, "You know—money, love." Her response was nonchalant as if she was rhetorically asking, "What do you think people ask for?" implying that individual wants are universal. In this context the belief was that resort owners were making kava offerings to the snake god, and asking for money to buy private islands. Interestingly, contemporary Christianity coins ancient gods as the "devil." The islanders thus perceived the exchange between the snake god and the resort owners as foreigners, literally, selling their soul to the devil.

To local Fijians, resort owners offering their soul in exchange for money, is not speculation, but truth. Usually, when people accuse someone of witchcraft, their claim is substantiated by seeing them go to the sea late at night and throwing a kava bowl into the ocean. In the case of the resort owners, no one claimed to have seen them throwing kava into the ocean late at night. Yet, individuals saw, with their own eyes, the giant snake living under the docks of private islands.

According to the narrative, the snake can also transform into a man. This was used

as evidence for the resort owners worshipping the snake god. People from the Kadavu cluster recalled stories they *heard* about a random man nobody knew wandering around a private island. This stranger proceeded to tell workers that the resort owner was worshipping the snake god. The man proved himself as a spirit when he divulged secrets to people about themselves. Islanders interpreted the stranger as the snake god manifesting himself to let the people know that the owner was worshipping him in exchange for wealth. The incentive for the snake god to tell people about the resort owner worshipping him was its way to "create problems."

To reiterate, this accusation did not appear to negatively impact the resort owners. Fijians were still inclined to work for them, and visitors who are mostly wealthy international tourists still came to the resorts. It did create confusion amongst locals as one man asked, "How do, you, white people know about our ancient gods?"

Cosmological accounts such as the one above add insight into cultural understandings of broader social problems. The role of Christianity mixed with indigenous beliefs illustrates the complexity when attempting to understand multiple worldviews (Orlove 2009). Whether or not outsiders agree with cosmological explanations, or simply dismiss them as folklore, to the people of Kadavu, the Kalou-vu are real forces in the seen and unseen world. This narrative illustrates how Fijians use supernatural explanations to understand inequality. Such explanations, which were evident throughout the islands, are also used to explain environmental changes.

## 5.3 Makers Remorse

"I saw you at church this morning. Vinaka."

–On going to church in the village

The British brought rugby and Christianity to Fiji. Both of which have become national past times and part of Fijian identity. Similarly, not attending church on Sunday, or cheering Fiji during rugby games are comparable to cardinal sins. Due to their influence on the masses, rugby and different religious affiliations are utilized to spread messages about climate change. In 2015, the Flying Fijians, the national rugby union team, changed their uniform to green for the Rugby World Cup as a message to the rest of the world that climate change is an immediate threat to the Pacific Islands ("New Facelift, Going Green." *Fiji Times,* September 14, 2015). BLK rugby sportswear used Bayleys Fiji Coral Coast 7s tournament to advocate for climate change awareness by printing messages such as "Climate Change is Real" and "Protect Our Environment" on the team's apparel (*Fiji Times* January 15, 2016). Likewise, faith-based organizations, independent of government, visit rural villages to educate people about climate change. While government officials are aware, and express frustration about the *mis*information some faith-based organizations spread, it is out of their control to prohibit them from entering villages.

As a result, rural communities are bombarded with diverging messages about environmental degradation. Faith-based organizations use religious discourses, while government officials and NGOs use scientific notions of "climate change" to explain coastal erosion. Yet, another message attempts to reconcile the religion-science schism by incorporating science into a biblical prophecy. The multitude of explanations for the

rising tides influenced how villagers interpreted the causes of coastal erosion on Ono Island. At the same time, these causal understandings shaped the way in which Narikoso villagers perceived relocation as an adaptation to climate change.

In Narikoso, both the biblical and scientific doctrine of climate change circulated throughout the village. Rather than give primacy to just one, villagers would simultaneously attribute cosmological and scientific reasoning to the rising tides. It was unclear if people *believed* both doctrines. The confusion is that the scientific explanation contradicts cosmological reasoning and vice versa. In this section I will address climate change as a discourse, give a brief overview of the discourses, and address how the two seemingly contradictory explanations of the rising tides coexisted. I will then analyze the implications of having multiple discourses in the village.

Climate change is a physical, cultural, and social phenomenon (Rudiak-Gould 2013). The physicality of climate change is made visible through alterations of our natural environment. Communities, rich and poor, experience these consequences through more frequent and intense storms, floods, droughts, coastal erosion, changes in temperature reducing food production, and disruption of ecosystems. At the same time, it is a conceptualization of ecological degradation (Hajer 1995; Hulme 2009; Rudiak-Gould 2011). Once restricted to Western elites and the formally educated, climate change discourse has become transnational, and is disseminated to the masses through various mediums including international and grassroots organizations, radio, newspaper, and television (Rudiak-Gould 2013). In its growing cache, "climate change" as a conceptualization has begun to reach more remote parts of the world embedding itself in local discourses in a multitude of ways (Rudiak-Gould 2011). Because of the

transnational nature of the climate change discourse, scholars are emphasizing a greater need to understand how indigenous communities in remote parts of the world are responding to climate change as a *discourse*.

Until recently, research on climate change and indigenous communities privileged people's observations of environmental change (Rudiak-Gould 2011; Rudiak-Gould 2013). More explicitly, literature focused on the changes that people saw throughout their landscape, but paid little attention to how people constructed meaning regarding the causes of these changes. Increasingly, more studies are paying attention to how communities are receiving these messages, and from *whom* they are receiving them (Rudiak-Gould 2013).

The growing literature in this realm highlights the various ways in which indigenous communities make sense of the environmental changes they experience. For example, in his study on Porgerans in Papua New Guinea, Jerry Jacka (2009) finds that climatic changes were interpreted as a rupture in the cosmological world. Porgerans believed climatic changes were a result of societal breakdown between themselves and their culture. Ben Orlove (2009:144) finds a similar cultural perception of environmental change amongst Peruvian herders, whom found glacier retreat as a "sign of the sadness of the spirits about the lack of human respect for the Earth and nature." Contrary to these studies, Peter Rudiak-Gould (2011) finds in the Marshallese Islands that the scientific discourse of climate change synthesized with local conceptions of Christianity, resulting in a global-local duality. In this study, he identifies the line between the two as blurred, and highlights how what are perceived as contradictory discourses are not always mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the scientific explanation for the causes of,

consequences, and responses to sea level rise are embedded in cultural frameworks of environmental change.

These studies shed light on another important aspect of adaptation to climate change. While scholars and scientists are searching for ways to assist with these shifts, social scientists are attempting to understand how people are adapting climate change discourses to their worldview (Rudiak-Gould 2013). The physical consequences of climate change are a tangible reality, however, ideological threats to society as a result of environmental changes are less noticeable (Jacka 2009). The ways in which people interpret these changes alters the way in which they perceive society and their cultural order (Jacka 2009; Rudiak-Gould 2013). This was evident in the village of Narikoso, in which people interpreted the rising tides as a moral breakdown of their community. However, this worldview is not unique to Narikoso, but is pervasive throughout parts of the South Pacific. The perpetuation of this worldview is partially attributed to the Christian doctrine, and the preachings of different churches throughout the region.

During my time in Suva, I met with a Pentecostal preacher. Ironically, I was looking to purchase a boat ticket to Narikoso, but walked into the wrong office building. When I spoke to the man at the desk, he explained to me that they were the office for the Kingdom of God. This mistaken encounter turned into an impromptu interview on religious presentations of coastal erosion in the South Pacific. This became critical in that I learned early on during my fieldwork that it is impossible to go to the South Pacific and not talk about God.

It is important to emphasize that not all religious congregations preach cosmological interpretations of coastal erosion. On the contrary, the Pacific Conference

of Churches (PCC), an ecumenical fellowship of churches throughout the Pacific, was solicited by the Fiji government to work alongside the relocation agenda and assist with educating villagers about the risks posed by climate change (Interview Exchange). They have been an instrumental force in educating Fijian villagers about climate change because of the reputation they have earned from their advocacy work throughout Fiji and the South Pacific Islands as a whole. As a respected institution, they are well known and respected as an authoritative institution throughout rural villages. While the PCC presents the causes of coastal erosion according to the scientific doctrine of climate change, the Kingdom of God has a counter narrative embedded in the Noah's Ark parable as depicted in the King James Version of the Bible.

The interview below with a preacher from The Kingdom of God, one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Fiji, revealed what types of messages were being conveyed to rural villages throughout Fiji. The preacher asked me, "Tell me, do you think we can stop the sea from rising?" Rather than answer with a yes or no I replied with a question, "Do you think we can stop the sea from rising?" He said, "Yes." He went on to quote Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.'" He interpreted this Biblical quote literally and used it as evidence to suggest that God gave Adam, and thus humankind, domination over nature. People, therefore, had the right to rule over nature and do what they wish, however, this also gave humankind authority to request nature behave in certain ways.

Faith-based organizations in Fiji often use religious interpretation to explain sea

level rise. The Pentecostal preacher was reiterating a common conception found throughout the Pacific: the belief that God controls the climate and the sea is rising because God is punishing people for their sins. He spoke about how communities had to repent, act righteously, and ask the sea to stop rising. He went on to explain, in more detail, the rising tides through the biblical story of Noah's Ark, in which God flooded the Earth because,

> The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord had regretted that he made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." (Genesis 6:5-7)

In the story of Noah's Ark, God spared Noah for being a faithful and righteous person, but punished the rest of the world with a flood. After forty days and forty nights of rain, God told Noah, "Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of the flood" (Genesis 9:11).

While the preacher used Noah's Ark as an explanation for the rising tides, he also used it as reasoning for why the people of Fiji would eventually be spared. The preacher and many Fijian communities believe that God will keep His covenant with Noah, and will never flood the Earth again (Rubow and Bird 2016). Broadly speaking, God will not destroy Fiji and the rest of the islands with water, but would use fire and disease as His weapon of choice.

However, the Noah's Ark narrative does not explain why the tides are currently rising. When I posed this question to the preacher, he proceeded to explain that God holds containers of water, one in the sky and one in the ocean "when we sin too much he

releases the water as a way to punish us. If we pray and ask the sea to stop where it is, it will listen. If we don't pray and repent for our sins then the sea will continue to rise." The preacher believes that people *will* repent, and this *will* cause the sea to retreat. I asked the preacher, "Do you go to villages and preach your message?" He said, "Yes. We tell them do you want to move to the hill? If you don't want to move you need to ask the sea to stop. You need to go to church. You need to pray. You need to do confession. If you don't, the sea will continue and you will have to move away."

Blind faith in God's promise to Noah gives some coastal communities a false sense of security. This frustrated government officials and community workers who constantly reiterated the damage of religious discourses to the well-being of the people. They felt that villagers living by the coast were naïve about the risks posed from the rising tides. Government workers saw it as their duty to provide villagers with information about climate change, the dangers generated by climate change, and information about how to protect themselves during climate disasters. Yet, they saw religious doctrines as inhibiting them from keeping villagers "safe" against the consequences of climate change.

In many cases, villagers' belief in God's covenant with Noah deterred them from taking precautionary measures against storm surges and coastal erosion. Unlike those individuals and families in Vunisavisavi and Vunidogoloa who evacuated their village when it was suggested by The Disaster Management Committee, some households in Narikoso went against government advice during cyclones, and stayed in their home as a testament to their faith. During interviews, people spoke about how they refused to temporarily take refuge away from the coast during Cyclone Tomas in 2010. This

sentiment was reiterated by a couple in their 20s living in a house that was frequently inundated by the sea. The husband and wife spoke with pride about how they did not seek refuge on the hill during Cyclone Tomas. The woman retold her story, "They [government workers] told us to move up the hill, but we stayed here. We prayed. We said, no. God will protect us." When the storm passed, the woman, her husband, and their baby were unharmed. She used this story as evidence of her belief system, maintaining that her family was spared because of God's protection. The story above highlights the possible repercussions of religious explanations for environmental change. Moreover, the damage caused by these messages is difficult to undo because religion, specifically, Christianity, is deeply embedded in indigenous Fijian culture.

Globally, religion has the power to mobilize and influence all spheres of social life. Discussions on this institution have grown to explain how religion shapes an array of social dynamics including people's relationship towards the environment (Berry 2015), demographic behavior (McQuillan 2004), and rituals regarding food practices (Johnson et al. 2011). The latter can even be extended to understand how religion motivates overall consumption habits of different substances. For example, overindulgence in the drink, kava, is a dominant topic throughout Fiji. Village women and government workers frequently spoke about kava abuse, and the negative social implications it has on the men, making them lazy, sexually promiscuous, and violent. Provincial officers sought to curb consumption through a government campaign. They organized visits to villages educating men on the negative health effects of kava and encouraged them to limit their consumptive behavior. Community workers, village women, and government workers maintained that these efforts went largely unnoticed. During this time, the Methodist

church created its own agenda to curb kava consumption.

Traditionally, the Methodist church allows kava drinking, but it changed its stance in 2014 to address grievances about kava abuse (Interview Exchange). In 2014, the Methodist church put a Sunday ban on the drink, and stipulated times throughout the day that people were allowed to drink kava. Although this ban occurred a year prior to my fieldwork, village men were still talking about the restrictions. They explicitly opposed it maintaining that kava is not a "drug," yet they begrudgingly observed the church's new stance. Men did not view these new restrictions favorably, but they followed the rules nonetheless. The Methodist Church kava ban parallels the religious explanations of climate change in Fiji. It shows the amount of power the church has relative to government on influencing people's behaviors.

The recognized influence of religion deterred some community organizers from dismissing religious explanations of environmental degradation altogether. Instead they would incorporate religion into their own discourse in unique ways. A scholar from University of the South Pacific elucidated how she incorporated religion into her climate change education models to combat damaging religious messages. She often worked with Tuvaluan communities, but planned on implementing the same model in rural Fijian villages. The following parable she relayed during an interview, offers a glimpse into how people are attempting to synthesize the climate change and religious prophecies:

> They always say God promised to never flood the Earth again. I tell them the story about an Australian man whose house was flooded from a storm. He's on the first floor of his house and a boat comes to save him from drowning. The man refuses to get on the boat and says, "No, my God will save me." The first floor gets flooded, so he goes to the second floor, and the boat comes trying to save him again. Again, he replies, "My God will save me." The second floor gets flooded, so he goes to the third, and again the boat comes to save him. He gives the same response, and has nowhere left to go but the roof. When he's on the roof, the clouds part, God comes

out, and says to the man, “Stupid man I sent a boat three times to save you.” Rather than reinforce the religion-science schism, she embedded science into a religious discourse. She articulated to the people that technology and adaptation measures are a “gift from God” that manifest through people. It was described as an *indirect* relationship—God gave people brains and skills to build things that would keep people safe. Yet, the primary difference between her message and that of the other two discourses is the focus on adaptation. For this individual, her fundamental concern was not that people understood how environmental change occurs, but rather that people stayed safe from the dangers posed by nature.

Contrary to the above approaches, government workers present the scientific narrative of climate change to educate communities about rising tides. It was unclear what other type of information was being disseminated to the people, but there were some general responses. When I asked government workers, “What types of messages do you give the villagers about climate change?” and I asked the villagers, “What does the government tell you about climate change?” answers were vague, but they converged. The themes that arose from these questions are: (1) causes of climate change, (2) responsibility for climate change, and (3) immediacy to address climate change. Interestingly, all of the themes from a scientific view seem to contradict the biblical prophecy of environmental change.

Government workers and villagers maintain that according to the science of climate change human activities, including carbon emissions and consumption patterns, are the cause of environmental degradation. While a religious doctrine also sees human activity as the culprit, the problematic activities are moral in nature, such as acts of

homosexuality, infidelity, and not attending church on Sunday. These are the issues that most individuals described as the cause of the rising tides. In regard to responsibility, when people discussed the climate science discourse, they placed blame on the people of the developed countries. Villagers maintained it was people like me—Americans and the people of the developed world causing their tides to rise. It was our cars, our flying all over the world, and our buying that threatens the survival of their islands. This is directly contrasted to religious explanation that reinforces self-blame (Rudiak-Gould 2014). It was not outsiders, but rumors of neighbors who were having extramarital affairs, friends who were engaging in homosexual activity, people practicing witchcraft, and family members who were not observing Sundays who were causing the tides to rise.

Lastly, in regard to immediacy to respond to environmental degradation, government workers reinforced the notion that the "tides will not stop rising." Sea level rise will continue to cause coastal erosion because it is caused by climate change, and the villagers cannot make it stop because it is out of their control. Local and national government workers emphasized that people were in imminent danger and needed to relocate. Yet, the religious explanation maintains that sea level rise will continue *if* people do not repent. From this perspective, God has control over the tides, but people can mediate through penance, and *demand* that the sea stop. Either way, the sea will eventually stop because of God's covenant with Noah, but it is a matter of when the sea will stop.

Resistance towards the climate change discourse manifested itself in resentment. As one villager stated, "We have been living like this for years. You come here with your science and bring fear." This claim displays hesitancy to "trust" the secular narrative of

environmental change. To him, and many others in the village, the environment just changes. People respond to these changes by creating their own adaptations whether it is mobility, as the Vunidogoloa villagers had done in the past, or building a seawall out of coral and boulders as the Narikoso villagers had done. This coincides with other regions around the world that implemented incremental adjustments to address coastal retreat. For example, in their research on collective action in response to coastal erosion in Belize, Marianne Karlsson and Grete Hovelsrud (2015) found that households created sea barricades out of palm fronds. Similarly, in the sense that a local adaptation was implemented without external assistance, Md Monirul Islam, Susannah Sallu, Klaus Hubacek, and Jouni Paavola (2014) found that households in Bangladesh responded to climate variability through movement. As these examples illustrate, perceptions of the environment shape the way in which people understand ecological change and the ways in which they choose to or *not to* respond.

Differing perceptions of environmental change also created a complex understanding of relocation as an adaptation to climate change. The emphasis on religion as the causal factor for environmental degradation in the village shaped how villagers perceived relocation. Since people believed that they were being punished for the sins of the village, they did not accept relocation as an adaptation to sea level rise. On the contrary, villagers argued that the waves would “chase” them up the hill as long as they continued to sin. Some validated this claim by noting that other villages on Ono Island were not being threatened with coastal erosion. One interviewee used this observation as evidence to show that Narikoso was in fact being punished, and other villages were being spared because they were faithful to God. Others alluded to religion *and* climate change,

by identifying climate change as the cause of the rising tides, and simultaneously acknowledging that relocation will not solve the "problem" if they do not make any lifestyle changes at the new site. Yet, if relocation is not a viable solution under the presumption that sinning is causing the tides to rise, what is the purpose of relocation?

For most villagers, the relocation efforts translated to the costs/benefits related to acquiring a new house. This was evident in the responses that I received, when I asked villagers, "How do you feel about relocating?" The answers varied, in which some people were opposed to moving and others were not. Unlike Vunidogoloa and Vunisavisavi, Narikoso villagers who were opposed to moving did not cite emotional attachment. This may be due to the closeness of the new site. However, their hesitation relied on practical reasons that would inhibit their everyday activities. For example, the new site is only 100 meters, equivalent to approximately 328 feet from the original site, but it is a relatively steep incline. The elders in Narikoso worried that the new site would inhibit their mobility. Others in the community had nice houses that they did not want to abandon.

Of those who did not oppose moving, people stated that the relocation was "good" because everyone would receive a new house. This contrasted to Vunidogoloa, in which the central tenet to the relocation was safety. In Vunidogoloa, every household mentioned concern for the children and elderly, and the dangers posed by the sea. In Narikoso, people mentioned the house. One woman said, "I like it. We get a new house with two rooms, a kitchen, a toilet." Another interviewee living with extended family maintained, "I will get my own house." A woman who was more financially well off than others in the village said, "It's good. There's some people in the village that wouldn't be able to build their own house." Villagers had also mentioned that only the youth would relocate

up the hill, but the elderly had no intention of moving.

Similar to Vunidogoloa, this raised a question for me: What is the purpose of relocation? In Vunidogoloa, a community that most people agreed had to relocate, the main question remains: Is relocation about moving people out of imminent dangers posed by the sea *or* is it about moving people *and* increasing the standard of living for rural populations? In Narikoso, a community that has some contentions about the necessity to relocate, the primary question is: Is relocation about keeping people safe *or* is relocation providing adequate housing for villagers?

The disputable nature of relocation is made clear in the fact that Narikoso villagers' worldview does not accept it as a viable solution to rising sea levels. According to religious perceptions of environmental change, God is causing the tides to rise, so only God has the power to stop the tides. From this perspective, and according to villagers, relocation is not the solution, penance and a shift in lifestyle is.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter began by discussing issues regarding development and tourism. I discussed uneven development within the Fiji Islands. By paying particular attention to how European colonizers created a metropolis out of Suva, I show how Kadavu's established peripheral status mirrors its contemporary position in respect to lower levels of development. Yet, I also emphasize how Kadavuan Islanders perceive and explain this social inequality from a cultural framework.

This chapter on Narikoso calls attention to the myriad of ways in which people understand the world. Of the three villages, the focus on religion was only evident in the

village of Narikoso. This does not mean that it is *unique* to this community. Cosmological accounts of social and environmental ills are pervasive throughout the Pacific (Rubow and Bird 2016). In regard to climate change, these narratives can be damaging not only to the well-being of the people, but also to the social fabric of the community.

The important observation in the case of Narikoso that parallels Vunidogoloa is unfulfilled promises made by the government. As one government worker maintained in regard to Vunidogoloa, “My fear is that if we make promises to the villagers and they are not met, it will break trust.” In this respect, Narikoso villagers’ expectations about the relocation were not being met by the government. The church, in contrast, is a respected institution that is seen as not giving false hope to the communities. The church does not make promises, they provide spiritual guidance. The juxtaposition between the scientific and religious narratives of coastal erosion raises an important question: Has distrust in the government also created distrust in the climate change narrative because it is preached by the government? On the contrary, faith-based organizations have not created a climate of distrust and they are the ones preaching theological explanations. Is it reasonable to suspect that people are not listening to the message, but instead looking at the institution that is delivering the message? Or does the climate change narrative instill feelings of hopelessness? By rejecting the climate change narrative and adopting the religious explanations, communities are rejecting a loss of control. They are resisting relocation because they believe they can make the sea stop. Within the religious narrative is a message of hope, safety, and the desire to live as communities had been living for centuries.

There is a third theme prevalent in this chapter. Is adaptation about ensuring that people understand causal explanations of environmental degradation or is it about keeping people safe? In a remote place such as Ono, villagers are not contributing the problem. There is no industry on the island. There are no cars on the island. There is no electricity on the island. The community is not destroying the mangroves. In this situation, the community cannot make any changes because they are not the cause of the problem. The role of adaptation is then to keep people safe.

The fundamental issue that remains from this chapter is centered around the need to understand multiple worldviews. Further research of how Western narratives interact with cultural and religious frameworks of social and ecological change is of high importance, especially in regard to climate change. Reason being, theological explanations of ecological degradation have the capacity to exacerbate or mitigate the impacts posed by climate change.

# CHAPTER 6

# VUNISAVISAVI

## 6.1 Vunisavisavi, the Catholic Village

“We’re Catholic. We love to dance.”

–Conversation with Vunisavisavi villager

Vunisavisavi and Vunidogoloa are both on the island of Vanua Levu, but share few similarities. Vunisavisavi is a Catholic settlement, whereas Vunidogoloa is Methodist. Vunisavisavi is substantially smaller with eleven households the majority of which are under the age of thirty. Government workers who assisted Vunisavisavi with their adaptation often drew conclusions from these demographic characteristics maintaining that Vunisavisavi is “less traditional” than other villages because of its youthful population. For government workers, this meant that people were more receptive to ideologies associated with “modernity” including women’s rights, democratic ideals, and a market-based economy. When I further inquired about these worldviews I was told, “You’ll see.” Although variables alluding to the social atmosphere transpired in time, there were immediate and visible geographic differences between the two sites.

The bus ride from Vunidogoloa to Vunisavisavi exposed the heterogeneity of the southern part of Vanua Levu. While Vunidogoloa’s original *and* relocated site is located in a lush and damp forested area, Vunisavisavi is nestled along the coastline in the more

drought prone southeastern part of the island. The dryness became more evident the further east we drove with vast greenery being replaced with dry hills, a partial byproduct of the 2015 El Nino oscillation.

After about an hour on the bus, my research assistant and I reached our destination. We exited the bus atop the settlement that gave us a bird's-eye view of Vunisavisavi. From here, we could see the ocean creeping into the settlement creating a dead zone where no vegetation was growing. As we visually surveyed the area, the Turaga Ni Koro along with some of the younger men from the settlement came to the road to meet us. They assisted us with our belongings, and guided us down the steep hillside to the eleven houses sitting along the coast. We dropped our bags off at Turani's house, which is where we were staying, and briefly conducted the sevusevu ceremony. The kava session was postponed until the evening, so the rest of the community could join.

Since we arrived while it was still light out, we were able to take a brief tour of the settlement. Turani took us along the shore and around the vicinity of the community. We went to the four houses that were being built a few feet away from the original site. We walked along the river that served as the village's water source years ago. We went into the brush to see where the springs *used* to flow. All the while, Turani told us about the history of the settlement, and the complex relationship it had with local government because of its association to Somosomo village on Taveuni Island. He discussed the Coastal Community Adaptation Project (C-CAP), including how the network between United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/C-CAP and the settlement was made. He told us about the process of the relocation, and his thoughts on the collaboration between the community and the NGO. He also informed us about some of

the other pressing environmental concerns that the community had to face. All the while, I kept asking myself the same question a former Roko Tui from Cakaudrove raised during an interview, “Why didn’t Vunisavisavi move before Vunidogoloa?”

It is difficult to compare levels of geographic vulnerability since it is often coupled with social vulnerabilities. Yet, Vunisavisavi *looked* as if they were at more risk than Vunidogoloa. The settlement was scattered with sparse remnants of a once rich ecosystem. Blades of grass poked out of the sandy beach that surrounded people’s houses. Scrawny coconut and barren breadfruit trees stood along the coast. These fragments of greenery and vegetation gave a glimpse into what the landscape used to look like, serving as evidence of a changed ecosystem. The ecological image of degradation was further substantiated by interviewee’s accounts of the changing environment.

According to those in the community, the shore was once grassy with coconut and breadfruit trees that provided food. One woman described the coconut trees as being abundant with meaty fruit, but pointed out how they were noticeably sparse with small and dry coconuts. She pointed out the blades of grass as evidence of the once rich soil, and talked about how they used to grow *bele* (Fijian spinach) around the houses until saltwater intrusion salinized the soil making it useless. Another woman said there had been a visible shift in crab catches, saying that there was less crab on the shore than there had been in the past. She compared the crab’s experience to her own, drawing parallels to how the encroaching sea was flooding the crab burrows forcing them to leave, similar to how sea level rise was forcing the community to move. Another man who had lived in Vunisavisavi for the duration of his life, spoke about how the ocean was bringing sediment into the community making it visibly rockier and sandier than it once was.

Of all the images in the settlement, the most iconic symbol is the baka tree that lies on the coast acting as a barrier between the ocean and the community. The baka tree commonly known as the Justice Tree uprooted during Cyclone Tomas. It was once used for climbing and entertainment, but now lies on the border of the settlement with waves crashing against its exposed roots. The irony of the uprooted Justice Tree on the shoreline of Vunisavisavi is representative of the larger discourse on climate change in the Pacific. The dominant narrative being one of inequality in which vulnerable communities in underdeveloped countries are being displaced due to the actions of wealthier nations, threatening people's cultural heritage and mere existence.

Of all three case studies, this inequality is most reminiscent of Vunisavisavi, because the community has no other option but to move. Whereas some government and NGO workers maintained that Vunidogoloa could have avoided moving by building deeper trenches. Similarly, it was argued that due to the dynamic nature of Narikoso's coast, the beach could possibly be rebuilt by replanting mangrove, removing the seawall that is contributing to the interference of sediment flow, and constructing breakers to rebuild the beach. Vunisavisavi, however, is severely eroded. The land is visibly degraded. The small farms that once surrounded the houses are nonexistent, and there is physically less space to move to. Considering the physical status of the settlement, I was surprised that there was not more media attention about the community.

I had not come across the name Vunisavisavi until I arrived in Fiji. I first heard about the settlement during an interview with an in-country coordinator of its relocation project. My network brought me to this individual because he had worked on numerous projects with the European Union and USAID. Because of this, his experience gave him

insight into environmental politics in the region, and the roles INGOs have in funding and implementing adaptation projects throughout the South Pacific. We initially discussed the general environmental governance overtone, but then our conversation deviated towards an examination of the Vunidogoloa relocation. He spoke about how Vunidogoloa was monopolizing media attention, but coastal erosion is an island wide concern that is affecting coastal communities throughout the region. He substantiated this statement by drawing attention to a remark made by the Prime Minister a year before in which Bainimarama emphasized that approximately 670 communities were threatened by climate change, some of which may have no other option but to relocate (Interview Exchange). This statement acted as a transition for him to discuss his position as an in-country coordinator for the USAID/C-CAP project in Vunisavisavi. He gave me a brief overview of the settlement describing the houses—some wooden, one concrete, and the rest tin. He explained that economic opportunities in the area included kava farming, fishing, and crabbing, and then summarized the cultural, financial, and environmental obstacles that were unique to this settlement.

This encounter led to my impromptu field visit to Vunisavisavi. Unfortunately, I spent a limited amount of time because of the relatively unplanned nature of the visit. A brief stay coupled with sparse written records of Vunisavisavi limits my findings. Consequently, the analysis of this case study is substantially less than the other analyses in this dissertation. However, the short time I was able to spend in the settlement elucidated the variety of outcomes that can prevail from relocation assistance.

In this chapter I focus on the nuances of Vunisavisavi's adaptation to coastal erosion. I pay specific attention to the organizing principles of the USAID/C-CAP

assisted relocation including the specific roles the community and agencies took on. I will show how the settlement organized independent from the government, strategically implementing local level guidelines. Lastly, I will examine how the discourse on coastal erosion led to an oversight of other pressing environmental issues in the community.

## 6.2 Shooting Stars, Falling Sky

*Boom* “What was that?” “The camera fell.” “I thought the sky was falling”

—A camera falling while staring at the stars

It is slightly misrepresentative to compare Vunisavisavi to the other two case studies in this dissertation because of the different actors involved in the community’s adaptation. Contrary to Narikoso and Vunidogoloa, the Fiji government had a miniscule, if any, role in Vunisavisavi. According to a former Provincial Officer government intervention occurred because, “This NGO USAID and C-CAP came to our office and asked if we needed assistance in adaptations of climate change. We gave them Vunisavisavi because Vunidogoloa had already been relocated. They were the ones that did the assessment.” The government then maintained a minimal presence, overseeing all the land transfers through the iTaukei Land Trust Board, but allowed C-CAP to take authority over the project.

Some community members have a more complicated account of government intervention. One paralleling a lack of accountability that was pervasive in Narikoso. According to the community, C-CAP had initially designated funds for the construction of six houses. At which point the Fiji government intervened, agreeing to financially assist with the construction of the remaining households in the community. Shortly after

promising financial assistance, the government "disappeared."

The third rendition of how C-CAP came to be involved in Vunisavisavi's relocation attributes it to the proactive nature of a community member. In 2014, a woman from the settlement attended a climate change workshop in Labasa on the island of Vanua Levu. There she met a representative from USAID, and asked them to visit Vunisavisavi to see if they could help the settlement in anyway. The organizational representative agreed, sending C-CAP workers to assess the level of environmental degradation. After seeing the status of the settlement, the organization promised to offer financial and technical assistance. Yet, prior to implementing any adaptation projects, C-CAP representatives returned a number of times to conduct workshops educating the community on the impacts of climate change. According to community members, during one of these workshops, C-CAP offered financial assistance for one of two environmental issues impacting the community: (1) coastal erosion or (2) water scarcity.

With USAID representatives present, the community voted between the construction of a seawall to combat coastal erosion or assistance with addressing water scarcity. The community was split with those further inland voting to designate funds towards alleviating water scarcity, and those closer to the shore opting for the seawall. Households that voted for the seawall were located in an inundation zone that was continuously being flooded during king tides. However, one elderly couple who lived in a house closest to the shore voted for improved infrastructure to secure water flow proclaiming that the community was not vulnerable to coastal erosion. When I inquired about their vote, attempting to understand why they perceived water scarcity as a more immediate concern, they identified locally controlled adaptation efforts for protecting the

shoreline. The 80-year-old husband and wife were aware that the coast was eroding, but they spoke about how the community planned to build a seawall out of large stones and plant mangroves to preserve the remainder of the shoreline. From their perspective, ensuring water security required more technical expertise with infrastructure and financial resources for piping and water tanks while coastal management was within community means. On the contrary, those individuals who voted for the seawall perceived the rising tides as a more imminent concern due to the visibility of the eroding coastline. The community maintained that at the time of the vote, the spring in which they received water from was still flowing. No one in the settlement anticipated that physical water scarcity would eventually become a major concern for Vunisavisavi and the neighboring villages.

Based on the community member's vote, C-CAP chose to designate an adaptation for coastal erosion. The original intent was to construct a seawall, but the outcome was a partial relocation. There are conflicting justifications as to why a seawall was not built. According to a C-CAP in-country coordinator, USAID said that it would be too costly to engineer a seawall. However, a USAID brief cites the Turaga Ni Koro of Vunisavisavi as saying, "After further consultations with USAID/C-CAP, we realized that we [originally] made the wrong decision…. We realized that…sea wall construction was just a short-term solution, and that a longer-term strategy, as demonstrated by the mapping, was needed" ("Transforming Lives" 2014, para. 9). An interviewee from USAID cites a different reason, claiming that the organization respected the wishes of the community members who did not want to relocate because of a cultural obligation to the site, which I discuss in further detail in Chapter 7. The above responses elucidate the variety of

reasons as to why a partial relocation was identified as the appropriate adaptation effort with explanations ranging from fiscal pressure, to a longer-term solution, to a cultural identification to place.

Although interviewees argued for one specific reason as to why a partial relocation was implemented, all of the above themes were referenced at some point. For example, some people cited fiscal pressure as to why a seawall was not built. This did not always emerge in respect to a seawall, but it was unanimously argued by community members I interviewed, that C-CAP had underestimated the cost of labor and materials. While the organization initially promised the construction of six houses, they were only able to cover the construction of four houses. Similarly, everyone maintained that geologists sent by USAID projected the entire settlement to be underwater in the next few decades. Given this information, relocation would be viable as the longer-term solution. Finally, it was unanimously stated by community members and government workers that the Chief who lives on the island of Taveuni would not allow the settlement to relocate arguing that the community has a cultural obligation to oversee the historical site. Despite motivations, the end result was a partial relocation with four houses moved to higher ground and weatherproofing of the remaining seven households.

Further complicating the initial decision to implement mobility as an adaptation versus a seawall is if relocation is even appropriate terminology. To refer to Vunisavisavi's adaptation as a relocation is something of a misnomer. Technically, the term "relocation" suggests movement from one place to another without any attention to distance. Yet, Vunisavisavi is identified as "higher ground adaptation." There are three explanations for adopting this specific terminology. The first two are bureaucratic and the

other is cultural. According to C-CAP workers, USAID was unwilling to fund a *relocation* because the organization did not recognize it as a viable adaptation. In order to address this loophole, the adaptation was strategically identified as "higher ground adaptation." According to a USAID representative, the agency has no bias against funding relocations, even though the organization prioritizes post-disaster reconstruction and infrastructure. But, Vunisavisavi did not fall under the agency's definition of "relocation," which is defined as a move to a *separate* village. However, villagers maintained that their Chief would not *allow* them to relocate because of a cultural obligation to the original site. The settlement respected the Chief's wishes by not "relocating," but compromised by moving a few houses further inland.

After it was decided that the village would implement higher ground adaptation efforts, the community again had to vote on which households would receive a new home. Since funds were originally designated for six houses, the settlement chose six. To be fair, the community selected one family from each *tokatoka* (organizational family unit) to receive a new house.

The community voted on six houses, but C-CAP made the executive decision on which houses would move. The agency chose to move one house that the community did not vote for because it was described as "unlivable." Although it was not threatened by sea level rise, Hurricane Tomas weakened the structure making it susceptible to future storms. This coupled with the family's lower socioeconomic status left them socially vulnerable while the remaining three houses, located by the shore were more geographically vulnerable relative to the other houses. The geographic vulnerability of the houses in the inundation zone was depicted in an interview with a couple in their 30s

in which they reflected on the aftermath of Hurricane Tomas. The couple spoke about their home flooding during the hurricane forcing them to temporarily seek refuge with a family member.

However, C-CAP also respected people's wishes *not* to move. This was indicative of a household chosen by the community, who then declined the offer to move. Unfortunately, I was unable to interview the residents since they were visiting another island. Yet, neighbors reported on their behalf, having heard rumors about the size of the houses in Vunidogoloa. According to others, the family chose to stay because they did not want to downsize. Despite the reasoning for not wanting to move, the important principle is that their decision to stay was respected. This particular instance aligns with the uncontested principle that the household has the final say, and will not be forcibly moved.

Once the decisions were made, a contract between the community and the agency was drafted. This element of the Vunisavisavi adaptation was an organizing principle that distinguishes it from the other two case studies. It was also a critical variable that attributed to the perceived fluidity of the Vunisavisavi adaptation process.

### 6.3 Write It Down

"When you come into the village, you have to sign in.

Everyone who comes into the village signs my logbook."

—Turaga Ni Koro of Vunidogoloa

A discussion on the importance of written documentation requires a brief discussion on Vunidogoloa. Unique to Vunidogoloa, the Turaga Ni Koro makes every

person who enters and exits the village sign in with their name, date, and purpose for visiting. He implemented the "guest sign in" during his initial appointment as village headman in the early 2000s to guarantee the safety of the community. Turani identified his informal but meticulous record keeping as a surveillance system that allowed him to monitor the foot traffic in the village. He maintained that the logbook ensured that strangers were not committing crimes within the village, or making unsubstantiated land agreements with villagers. In the circumstance that something did happen, he would be able to reference his books to see who was there and hold the person accountable. Initially intended to oversee visitors, the logbook would eventually become a critical component to Vunidogoloa's relocation.

The numerous signatures Turani acquired during his appointment gave insight into the village's increasing notoriety. Earlier entries made visible the inconspicuous nature of the small coastal community that was located on the shore of Natewa Bay. Prior to relocation, entries were minimal with visitors being family members or friends of villagers who were just coming by to say hello. Perusal of the logbook showed that months went by where there were no documented visitors except three small tidal waves that rolled into the village during high tide. When the relocation was proposed, signatures became many—schoolchildren coming for fieldtrips, laborers assisting with the building, members from PCC holding climate change education workshops, and government workers overseeing the project. After the relocation, signatures became even more diverse with visitors from different parts of the world coming with their own agenda whether it be to assist with raising funds for a church, or coming to talk with the villagers about their move.

One signature stood out amongst the multitude of logbooks. An entry in 2009 showed documentation of a government worker visiting the village. According to Vunidogoloa villagers, the worker suggested to village leaders that they move inland, away from the coast. He then offered government assistance if/when the village chose to move. According to a former Provincial Officer, when village leaders finally decided to relocate, the Turaga Ni Koro kept coming to the Provincial Office with his logbook to show the physical record of the government worker's verbal testimony. This sole piece of documentation is accredited for Vunidogoloa's move because it made it difficult for the government to retract or deny their offer of assistance.

It is paradoxical that while the written word was crucial to Vunidogoloa's relocation, the process itself was never physically recorded. The narrative above elucidates the importance of physical documentation. A written reference documenting roles, expectations, and timeline of the relocation process was null in Narikoso and Vunidogoloa. Government workers constantly pointed to this aspect as a drawback. It made it impossible to validate what promises were made to the villages. Furthermore, without a tangible reference, it is difficult to identify *successes* and *failures* of the projects.

Adding to the importance of physical documentation is the fact that Vunasaivisavi's adaptation effort was coupled with a contract, which was cited as the reason for the fluidity of the project. Prior to the start of building and weatherproofing of the houses, a contract, one in iTaukei and one in English, was created. It dictated the roles of USAID/C-CAP and the community, specifying which group would be responsible for which component of the relocation.

The importance of the written agreement was implicit in village responses. Unlike the other two cases, people had uniform responses to their role in the adaptation process. Community members discussed how able-bodied men in the community were required to prep the land for the new houses. In addition, they were expected to demolish the four houses that were going to be rebuilt, and reuse the materials to construct the kitchen and bathroom in the new houses. The four families that were receiving new houses cited their responsibility for taking care of the contractors, this entailed cooking meals for the workers. In return, C-CAP agreed to provide materials, tools, and labor for the new houses. They hired laborers from Habitat for Humanity, but guaranteed continuous oversight, ensuring that all engineering was done properly and in a timely manner. Community members all drew attention to this component, explaining that the contractors were forced to redo part of one of the houses because it was not constructed according to safety standards. In addition, C-CAP agreed to provide training so people could maintain their households. Unlike the other two villages, community members in Vunisavisavi responded in uniformity about delegated roles. They also pointed out that all of this was documented in the contract, informing me that I should just get a copy of the contract from the Turaga Ni Koro, and it would tell me everything.

Reference to the contract signifies the symbolic nature of documentation. It serves as validation and physical proof of people's responses. It substantiates the verbal claims of all those involved in Vunisavisavi's adaptation effort. More importantly it serves as a testimony of oral witness (Clanchy 2012). The contract is more than a dictation of responsibilities and expectations, it is a symbolic representation of a conversation between C-CAP and Vunisavisavi.

A physical contract contributed to a fluid and transparent adaptation effort for Vunisavisavi. Yet, some scholars disagree about the significance of written documents. Jan Vansina's (2006) research on oral traditions identifies ethnocentric reasons for privileging the written word over the spoken word. She proclaims that European's prejudice of orality gave the illusion that verbal testimonies were untrustworthy. Other scholars do cite trustworthiness as a variable, but identify the obvious advantage of a written record in that it cannot be as easily changed as a person's word (Clanchy 2012). This is not an indicator of lying per se, but draws attention to the fact that in verbal claims, *truth* only exists in people's memories (Clanchy 2012). Truth is then personal and dynamic in nature making it impermanent.

Although some see impermanence as a downfall, others view the permanency of the written word as a limitation. In their study on the trajectory of literacy, Jack Goody and Ian Watt (1963:327) identify historical critiques of the written form, one in which writing is viewed as shallow because "the essential principles of truth can only be arrived at dialectically." From this perspective, the art of conversation with questions and answers allows for clarity and miscommunications to be fixed. Whereas written form makes miscommunications permanent. In addition, writing does not always have the capacity to communicate *ideas*, so it is often accused of perpetuating inaccuracies.

Regardless of ones' perceptions of written documentation, the development of writing transformed society (Clanchy 2012). Argued to be an unrecognized revolution on par with other historical transitions, the proliferation of the written word has made it so almost everyone's life has become dependent on writing (Clanchy 2012; Einstein 2005). Despite its significance, it has not replaced the spoken word; what has evolved is a half-

oral half-literate society (Clanchy 2012; Einstein 2005). Part of this is a product of societal resistance to social change (Einstein 2005). This was evident in the Turaga Ni Koro of Vunidogoloa's records. People always alluded to his books and talked about them with such awe. What made them particularly impressive is that he deviated from the norm. It is not common to have such meticulous record keeping, although they are not an anomaly, they are sparse.

Fiji is an oral culture, hardly anything is ever written down (Interview exchange). Stories are the primary way in which individuals disseminate information to each other. This practice holds true for civil society *and* Fijian bureaucratic structures. However, Weberian bureaucratic theory promoted the notion of record keeping, identifying it as part of the rationale of bureaucratic structures (Lutzker 1982). Documentation has thus become a taken-for-granted. Because of this it seems counter intuitive that a government initiative would not physically document a process considering *government* is the quintessential bureaucracy. In the case of Fiji, the prevalence of orality over written form is due to the fact that western systems of literacy are relatively recent (Janif et al. 2016).

By comparing the presence of the written word in Vunisavisavi to the nonexistent nature of documentation in Narikoso and Vunidogoloa, we gain a comprehensive understanding of its importance. The written form has its limitations in that it does not always accurately convey ideas, but it is important in that it serves as a reference to a specific moment in time. Thus, a contract acts as evidence of a conversation. In the case of Vunisavisavi, the contract was advantageous in that it made clear which actor would assume what role. Substantiating this is the fact that the lack of a contract or written process in the other cases was identified by government workers as a flaw in the model,

arguing that it allowed the government to bypass accountability for false promises. In addition, without a contract to define responsibilities, unfulfilled expectations became a case of conflicting reports with no substantive evidence to suggest which party did not fulfill their duties.

Interestingly, Narikoso and Vunidogoloa faced barriers from not having a written document, whereas Vunisavisavi showed the importance of a contract. However, Narikoso and Vunidogoloa were advantaged in having political representation, something Vunisavisavi was removed from.

## 6.4 It's A New Start

"They're not starting over. They're starting new."

—Conversation about the youth in the community

Vunisavisavi navigates an evasive legal position. Unlike Narikoso and Vunidogoloa, the community is technically a settlement. It is often assumed that settlements are informal, implying that the population living within them is squatting, and therefore landless. Contrary to this assumption, Vunisavisavi settlers have legal rights to the land they live on. Yet, they have the status of settlement because they are one of approximately a dozen settlements that comprise the larger chiefly village of Somosomo located on the neighboring island of Taveuni, East of Vanua Levu (Spurway 2015).

Being part of Somosomo village meant that the Provincial Office in Taveuni was the local government representative for Vunisavisavi's concerns. Although the island of Taveuni is visible from the settlement's coastline, it is a fiberglass boat ride away. Geographic distance in conjunction with communication barriers due to limited cellular

phone service makes communication between the community and Taveuni's Provincial Office difficult. As a result, their development concerns or requests for government assistance were being overlooked. Finally, in 2014, after years of grievances from the settlement, the Provincial Office of Cakaudrove in Savusavu agreed to oversee their needs (Interview Exchange).

The importance of government oversight can be critical to a community. As mentioned previously, the Provincial Office acts on behalf of the village, taking their needs to the appropriate government Ministry. A former Provincial Officer emphasized this when I asked about her previous job title, in which she stated, "The communities tell us what they need and I get it for them." Yet, the geographic isolation of Vunisavisavi from the Provincial Office that represented them left the settlement in the periphery. A similar sentiment was reiterated in an interview in which a government worker spoke about geographic isolation in general. She stated, "There are outer islands asking for assistance, but we can't help them because we can't get to them. Think there are people living on these islands." Vunisavisavi is not geographically isolated in the same sense that the interviewee was describing, but the comment parallels the settlement's position in that the community was physically removed from its representation. Only adding to the settlement's frustration was that they were within proximity to an administrative center in Savusavu, but bureaucratic constraints prohibited them from using its resources.

Unlike the other two case studies in this dissertation, which were hindered by *miscommunication*, Vunisavisavi's case signifies the barriers to ineffective communication *structures*. Effective communication in this regard is the community's physical access to their decision-making entity. Without access to bureaucratic assistance,

communities are thus forced to execute their own adaptive solutions.

When I arrived in Vunisavisavi, Habitat for Humanity was constructing four houses through C-CAP funding. Independent of the adaptation effort, a couple of houses in the settlement were being built—one behind the C-CAP houses where the river flowed, and another on the hillside across the road. Working on these houses were a slew of young men from the settlement. When I inquired about the construction, the Turaga Ni Koro said that some young men in the settlement had just been married and were building a house to start their new family. In this context, marriage acted as a significant indicator that influenced people's decision to build a house.

Marriage in Fiji serves a dual purpose. It acts as a social determinant of living arrangements for individuals. The marital status of adult children is important in this context because it is an important indicator of household membership since it is assumed that unmarried adult children will remain with their parents. Since Fiji is a patrilineal system, women may sometimes move in with the husband's family, but more often than not married couples will move into their own household. At the same time, marriage is an identifier of adulthood. The notion of marriage being equated with "adult" is explicitly referenced in Fijian language in regard to village hierarchy. For example, a "youth" in the village is either a married couple under the age of 30, or an unmarried individual of any age. So, a "youth" can either be a 28-year-old married couple, or a 50-year-old individual who has never been married (Interview Exchange). The important implication of marriage in this particular analysis is that the construction of these new houses in the village is symbolic of a "start;" a transition into adulthood. For these specific young men who were constructing their house, the move was then not them "starting over" as it was

described for the people receiving a new house.

Another important observation about the houses is *where* they were being built. Although, they were farther from the rest of the community, they were also farther from the shore. This was due to the implementation of a community level policy in which all future houses have to be constructed away from the shore, specifically behind the C-CAP houses. Vunisavisavi's young demographic coupled with a societal expectation of marriage equates to new houses being built in the near future. The implementation of the community's building guidelines also means newlyweds will assumingly build their houses farther from the shore. While this may not result in entirety, it will eventually lead to the settlement naturally shifting inland.

The application of Vunisavisavi's building zone guidelines shows how the settlement implemented an adaptation policy for coastal erosion without external regulations. Thus, executing full agency over community affairs. Elinor Ostrom (1990) applied the same concept of self-organization and self-governance to the "commons." In her pivotal research *Governing the Commons* (1990), she debunks Garrett Hardin's (1968:1244) "Tragedy of the Commons" thesis, which assumed the drive for individuals to act out of self-interest resulting in the exploitation of common resources. From the development of his thesis, government workers, scholars, and economists assumed a policy prescription of regulating the commons. In the world of politics, this means centralized governments or the market maintaining control over natural resource systems (Ostrom 1990). Ostrom challenges Hardin's notion, arguing that local actors are capable of cooperation, primarily if it ensures sustainable and equitable access to common local resources. Through case studies, she shows how communities around the world are able

to sustainably manage natural resources without government regulations.

The systems are different in that Ostrom (1990) draws attention to the conservation of communal resources, while Vunisavisavi is an example of a local level adaptation. However, there is a common methodology in that both cases identify local control over a community's relationship to its environment. Ostrom's (1990) research parallels Vunisavisavi's building guidelines as an example of how a community self-organizes independent of central government. While Ostrom (1990) identifies self-governance principles as a mechanism to ensure the sustainability of the commons, Vunisavisavi's policy ensures the safety of the people.

The settlement's local building policy debunks the major assumption driving Fiji's National Relocation Guidelines—local communities need their relationship with nature managed by external stakeholders. On the contrary, the community creating a policy that modifies its building zone is evidence of the way local institutions adapt to changing landscapes. By doing so, they are executing full autonomy over their settlement. Yet, a no building zone policy has its limitations when land is scarce.

## 6.5 It's Not Fair

"Vunidogoloa has something like 6,000 acres and you only have 80?"

"I know. It's not fair."

–Conversation with Vunisavisavi village leader

Vunisavisavi reflects one of the lesser-discussed inequalities that exist in Fiji, the unequal distribution of land *amongst* mataqalis (Bayliss-Smith et al. 1988). Land exclusion policies are often discussed across ethnic lines with indigenous Fijians having

access to mataqali land through customary tenure systems, while Fijians of Indian descent rely on the purchase of freehold land or leases from customary land owners (Mohanty, Reddy, and Naidu 2006). Yet, landlessness is not confined to Fijians of Indian descent. It is estimated that indigenous Fijians own approximately 90 percent of Fiji's land, but the land tenure structure is rooted in class inequalities and unequal distribution of customary land titles, resulting in a number of landless indigenous Fijians (Mohanty et al. 2006; Thornton 2011).

There are multiple reasons for "landlessness." Some were described as social. These were elucidated in informal conversations I had with Fijians and scholars throughout the islands. People spoke of social sanctioning. In this case "landlessness" does not pertain to exclusion from land, but rather exclusion from the community. Individuals are often excommunicated from their village and forced to move to either urban areas or other villages because of rumors of witchcraft, infidelity, or rape. There are also systemic policies that exclude people from land and/or resulted in a minimal allocation of land amongst indigenous Fijians. Most of these policies have roots in the establishment of a colonial government.

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, Gordon's Commission reorganized Fijian social structures. To reiterate, two colonial policies of crucial importance to the environmental migration literature are: (1) the creation of fixed boundaries and (2) tying mataqalis to pieces of land. The alienation of people from land is not a practice unique to colonialism. Throughout precolonial Fiji, powerful actors have alienated less powerful groups, displacing them from their land. As many scholars have pointed out, David Lea (2008) being one, Fijian society has always been highly stratified with the concentration

of power being in the hands of the Chiefs. Lea (2008:156) emphasizes this point in his chapter on the alienation of land in Fiji where he states, "It was well known that the Chiefs treated the land as their own and freely sold habitually transferring commoners from one block of land to another without scruple." In his analysis, he illustrates that colonialism did not *create* land exclusion. This discussion slightly deviates in that it focuses on how a land policy created over a century ago, during a specific social context, has had lasting implications for the community of Vunisavisavi.

As Fijian social anthropologist Rusiate Nayacakalou (1971:213) identifies in regard to colonial policies,

> One serious defect in the Commission's interpretation of Fijian custom is that it froze the landowning units at a particular time by tying them to particular pieces of land. But over the years these social groups have grown or decayed, moved to new locations or reconstituted themselves in response to pressures of population, conflict, rivalry or jealousy, competition for power or women, and nowadays in response to employment and other quite novel factors. The outcome of this process is a new social scene that bears little relation to the Commission's records.

He further points out the decoupling of the records and Fiji in 1970,

> The record tells the story of fifty years ago, and the society tells the story of today; the difference is explained by half a century of social adjustment, and the resulting strains in land distribution are accommodated by makeshift arrangements which have no legal support.

Although Nayacakalou was writing in the 1970s, his main point is that the Commission created a static system in a dynamic society. Sir Arthur Gordon and the British Commission could not foresee social changes. The inability to account for population growth, urbanization, and conflict has left certain groups and individuals vulnerable. In some cases, these changes have rendered people "landless."

While Nayacakalou (1971) tells the story of unforeseeable social changes, Lea (2008) discusses how some groups were disadvantaged from the start. Sir Arthur

Gordon's meeting with the Chiefs in 1897, which led to Fiji's customary land tenure system, gives the illusion of a harmonious agreement between the colonizers and the colonized. By reserving land for indigenous Fijians and descendants, the colonial government was able to allocate land for its sugar plantations, and the Fijians were able to continue with their "traditional" way of life with no interference from the British. On the contrary, there was resistance from Fijians to register the land (France 1969; Lea 2008). Many native Fijians saw the "mataqali [as] either a vague, fairly meaningless concept or often where more fully comprehensible was not regarded as the locus of land ownership" (Lea 2008:157). Consequently, some failed to comply with land registration, were not registered by the system, and thus were not allocated land.

Initially, Vunisavisavi was not disadvantaged by the land registration system. On the contrary, the system privileged the settlement since they were part of the Chiefly village of Somosomo, and the primary residence of one of the highest Chiefs in Fiji (which I discuss in further detail in the following chapter). As a whole, Somosomo village was allocated part of Vanua Levu and all of Taveuni. Throughout the years, Somosomo village has become less politically important, complicating Vunisavisavi's land status.

According to a village leader, Vunisavisavi only has about 80 acres of land, most of which is unusable because it is along a steep hillside. When I asked the Turaga Ni Koro about the vast unequal distribution of land between them and Vunidogoloa, he responded with, "I know. It's not fair," and proceeded to tell me about the historical position of Vunisavisavi. Since they are part of a larger Chiefly village, the land is partitioned amongst the settlements with the largest portion going to the Chief. He further discussed

the historical role of the settlement to supply crops for the Chief in Taveuni, so the needs of the people were neglected to meet the needs of the Chief. Vunsiavisavi exemplifies Nayacakalou's (1971) analysis in that the way land was distributed over a hundred years ago does not reflect the contemporary social climate. Vunisavisavi still only has 80 acres of land, even though its indebtedness to the high Chief has diminished in time. In addition, the historical legacy of the high Chief of Somosomo has prescribed advantages to his descendants with larger allocations of land, even though the Chiefly title is substantially less important than it was at the time of land redistribution. Nayacakalou (1971) focuses on the effect social change has on land distribution, but compounding this is the fact that landscapes are also dynamic.

Vunisavisavi's land status is further complicated by its eroding shoreline. Of its 80 acres, a vast amount is not viable to be built on, and another large portion of it is deteriorating. Unlike the other two case studies in this dissertation, Vunisavisavi's limited amount of land leaves the community with fewer options. As the Turani lamented about the ecological status of his settlement, he said, "I don't want to move." I asked, "Why?" To which he replied, "Because I'll have to go to town and I don't want to live in town." For the Turani, he preferred village life. As did most of the community that was living in Vunisavisavi.

For some it was the preference of lifestyle, but for others Vunisavisavi was their home. An 80-year-old elderly couple that was moving up the hill grieved the loss of their house. Both husband and wife cried as they spoke about building their home in 1976. They talked in detail about how they gathered large stones from around the settlement for the foundation of their house, cut down trees for the lumber, brought the trunks to the

settlement in the bilibili, and treated the wood by soaking it in seawater to get the bugs out. The couple had no desire to leave Vunisavisavi, or their house for that matter. Both agreed had it not been for their children making them move, they would have chosen to die in their home.

Despite the wants of households to stay in the community, they may be forced to move. Surprisingly this has nothing to do with coastal erosion, but a lack of available freshwater in the settlement. As the Turani stated, "We can't live here without any water."

## 6.6 Are You Empty?

"Are you empty or are you full?" "What do you mean?"

"Are you married? If you're married you're full. If you're not married you're empty."

–Conversation around kava bowl

As a regional grouping the small island developing states are treated as homogenous. It is often assumed they are uniform in culture, geographic vulnerability, and forms of environmental degradation. However, across islands in the South Pacific, degrees of vulnerability vary according to topography and levels of development. For example, Fiji with its more-developed economy of the small islands and mountainous terrain has more resources and the option to move coastal communities inland. Tuvalu in comparison has a lower level of economic development, and a high peak estimated at approximately 11 feet. Tuvaluans thus do not have the option to relocate inland, and face possible displacement from their country. To further complicate the notion of regional heterogeneity, there is also intraregional variation in regard to levels of development and

geographic isolation, as was shown with Kadavu's peripheral status in relation to Suva.

Fijian communities also differ with respect to ecological degradation. The threat coastal erosion poses to Fijian communities monopolizes media attention giving an illusion that sea level rise is *the* threat to small islands. This overshadows the fact that there are a multitude of ecological threats to urban and rural communities throughout Fiji. This was evident in all three case studies in which Narikoso, Vunidogoloa, and Vunisavisavi were all experiencing coastal degradation along with other forms of environmental hazards. For example, half of Narikoso expressed the need to relocate because of hillside erosion. Families with houses built on the hill discussed their fear of the boulders that would occasionally break loose. In one instance, a woman spoke of having to rebuild her house after a boulder demolished it. In Vunidogoloa, riverbank erosion from more frequent flooding caused more land loss than coastal erosion. In Vunisavisavi there was a water shortage caused by an El Nino induced drought.

In 2015, the Northern and Western divisions of Fiji were suffering from a drought associated with the El Nino Southern Oscillation. El Ninos are accepted as natural variability in the climatic system that occur every 10-12 years, but there is evidence suggesting that warming ocean temperatures will lead to an increase and more intense El Nino events (Cai et al. 2014). This point was made evident through conferences in which meteorologists compared the intensity of the 2015 El Nino to the events of 1997/1998 in which some areas of Fiji experienced the driest 10 months on record (Singh et al. 2001).

The *naturalness* of the drought was an area of contentious debate. Some scholars and scientists were saying the drought was induced by El Nino, and thus temporary. It was also suggested that the springs that had gone dry would reinvigorate when the

climate stabilized. Yet others maintained that the drought was *unnatural* in that it was a byproduct of climate change. The question surrounding the *naturalness* of the drought raised concerns about the temporal dimensions of the new climate variability. Was the drier climate the new norm? Or would rainfall patterns go back to normal after El Nino? Would the springs reinvigorate? Or would these regions be dry?

Beyond the scope of the *cause* of the drought, many scholars and government workers referred to the change in climate sarcastically with statements such as, “Fiji is in a drought.” The dark humor of this statement was illustrated in the context in which people said it. I arrived in Suva during August where it rained for a solid week. Throughout my stay, I learned that it rarely stops raining in Suva. After weeks of rain, it was impossible to avoid the conversation about Fiji being in a drought. People would laugh as it showered and say, “Did you hear? There’s a drought.” These comments draw attention to the ecological variation of the islands. While the Northern and Western Divisions were receiving minimal rainfall, the Central and Eastern Divisions were experiencing extreme rainfall. This also points to the misleading nature of categorizing the country as a whole, and therefore the challenges in assessing environmental degradation. As a result, “Fiji’s drought” was overshadowing other environmental concerns associated with extreme rainfall such as flooding riverbanks in Suva. Similarly, attention to Vunisavisavi’s eroding coastline drew attention away from its water crisis.

Prior to visiting the settlement, I was told to make sure I bring water. I knew there was a physical lack of water, but I was unaware of its severity. After an hour in the settlement, coastal erosion seemed trivial in comparison to the water crisis. This transpired in interviews as well, which were dominated by conversations of water

scarcity. As the Turaga Ni Koro stated during our ecological tour of the settlement, “You came here to talk about relocation and we’ve talked mostly about water.”

Vunisavisavi’s water crisis has its own history. As Turani took us through the brush, he gave a historical overview of the water sources the community utilized throughout the years. We walked along the river, which served as the settlement’s first water source during the time of his great-great-grandparents. The river was clean enough to drink from, but this changed when his grandfather was young. According to the Turani, the government mined gravel from the riverbed to construct the nearby road. Removal of the gravel modified the channel where the river met the sea. As a result seawater infiltrated the river system during high tide contaminating their freshwater supply. Since the government was responsible for spoiling the community’s water source, they provided financial assistance for piping to bring water from a spring in the hills to the settlement. The community relied on the spring for approximately 30 years, but the population of the settlement grew, and the spring could not sustain the rising population (Interview Exchange). Again, with financial assistance from the government the community identified another spring, invested in more piping, and a 5 thousand liter tank. They used this spring for about a year until it went dry from a lack of rainfall. Rather than look for another spring, Turani brought a *tabua* (sperm whale’s tooth used in negotiations between Chiefs) to the neighboring village’s Chief and requested access to their water. The Chief said, “Yes,” but then told them to look for another water source because the spring was running low, and he wanted to preserve the remainder for his village. The community then found another spring again in the hills, and the men from the settlement started construction of the piping. For 3 months they worked on the piping and fetched

water from this spring, but it dried up.

At the time of my fieldwork, the community was gathering water from a neighboring village. Every day the men and women would take a 20-minute boat ride down the river and come back with buckets of water to disperse across the households. As caretakers of the household, women had an especially difficult time. As one woman lamented about the amount of time that was consumed by travelling just to clean clothes and dishes. The uncertainty of the settlement was heightened the day before I arrived because the neighboring community just informed them their spring was low, too. Both Vunisavisavi and the neighboring village were going to have to find a new water source.

The Fiji government did not abandon Vunisavisavi. According to community members they had been working with Fiji's Water Authority. The Water Authority identified a spring and informed the settlement that it would not dry up. However, the agreement is that the community has to raise one-tenth of the piping costs. This was estimated at about 20-30 thousand Fiji dollars, which is a substantial amount of money for a settlement with only eleven houses, and that relies on selling kava, fish, and crops for its income. However, the primary concern of the community was not money but time. As the Turani maintained, there is no time when there is no water.

Coastal communities throughout Fiji are experiencing an unprecedented loss of land from coastal erosion. Scientific reports and people's observations of changing landscapes substantiate this claim. However, there are a multitude of other ecological concerns that are of equal importance, but are being neglected. Vunisavisavi illustrates this point, in which attention to coastal erosion overshadowed its impending water crisis. In this case study, there is another component embedded in the decision to prioritize

relocation over water security, and that is visibility. Immediately visible events associated with coastal degradation impacted the community's perception of importance, shifting focus from the water shortage to coastal erosion.

There are some important lessons learned from Vunisavisavi. First, how can decision-making entities better prioritize environmental challenges? Second, how can decision-making more fully integrate ecological processes? The latter of these addresses the question: Was there a way to foreshadow the water shortage?

Vunisavisavi's case study is complex. It illustrates concerns associated with political representation, generational shifts in cultural attitudes, unequal distribution of land, and environmental challenges independent of coastal erosion. It is the epitome of how ecological degradation *is* a driver of migration. Vunidogoloa and Narikoso villagers would discuss the eroding shoreline, maintaining that still they had no intention of relocating. Access to fisheries, water, farms, and familiarity outweighed costs associated with ecological degradation. Communities endured. They planted mangroves. They built seawalls. Likewise, those who lived in Vunisavisavi never had any intention of allowing the rising sea to push them out of their settlement. But a lack of water, as the Turani argued, gives them no choice but to leave.

In this chapter I discussed the evasive legal position that Vunisavisavi navigates. I examined how the written contract with C-CAP was critical to the fluidity of the community. I ended with a discussion on how coastal erosion as a form of ecological degradation was being prioritized over other important environmental concerns. In the next chapter, I address the unique cultural history of Vunisavisavi.

# CHAPTER 7

# CULTURE IN VUNISAVISAVI

## 7.1 Introduction

The notion that Fiji is culturally homogenous is simply a postcolonial ideal. The portrayal of Fijian islanders as culturally homogenous reproduces colonial representations of the *other* allowing for an oversimplified understanding of island culture. In her study on Chiefly politics in Fiji, Stephanie Lawson (1990) maintains that prior to the settlers there was no unified Fiji—politically or culturally. On the contrary, Fiji's population is ethnically diverse resulting in a multitude of characteristics. One of these being a multilingual society with English, Fijian, and Fiji Hindi as the lingua franca of equal standing (Mangubhai and Mugler 2006). Adding to the complexity of an ethnically diverse Fiji is the fact that *amongst* indigenous Fijians there are also multiple histories, origin stories, myths, taboos, and again dialectical variation (Mangubhai and Mugler 2006). Regional variations illustrate the historical diversity of the islands, and the unique place they hold in contemporary Fijian society.

Scholars postulate that a more accurate description of the islands is a collection of chiefly states (Howard 1991; Lawson 1990). This is especially true when describing Fiji's pre-European era when provinces were riddled with social variation, alliances, and rivalries with chiefs vying for power (Howard 1991). As an inherently stratified society,

chiefly empires were hierarchical in ranking with power and influence concentrated in different regions. Some of which are still reflected in contemporary Fiji. For example, descendants from the Chiefly Island of Bau are granted the title of *Adi* (female title of chiefly rank) and *Ratu* (male title of chiefly rank) to illustrate their social standing within Fijian society. Although, Bau has maintained its traditional authority in the wake of change, other hierarchies have diminished in influence. This is the case of Vunisavisavi in Cakaudrove Province.

In this chapter, I discuss the importance of Vunisavisavi as a cultural heritage site. I use the case of the Lalagavesi to discuss moral challenges associated with climate change, specifically the threat ecological degradation poses to culture. Using the case of Vunisavisavi, I examine how proposed adaptations in the form of technological and economic fixes are unable to compensate for the intrinsic and cultural value of nature. Broadly, I illustrate how technical solutions undermine the cultural consequences associated with climate change.

## 7.2 Sandalwood Island

"People in the village want the money that people have in town,
but they don't utilize the land."
—Conversation with Provincial Officer about the lucrative kava farming business

During the precolonial era, Cakaudrove Province was one of three epicenters of authority (Fraenkel 2000). Vunisavisavi was the original residence of Ro Kevu, the first Tui Cakau, also known as the Paramount Chief of Cakaudrove, who was of particular importance to the country (Lawson 1990; Parke 2014). The Tui Cakau as the third

highest ranking Chief in all of Fiji was, and still is, one of the more prestigious titles one could hold. His rule over Taveuni, Lau, and the southern part of Vanua Levu came from an ideology of cosmological legitimacy stemming from his membership to the i Sokula lineage (Lawson 1990; Parke 2014; Sayes 2008; Scarr 1970). As Shelley Anne Sayes (2008:3) states in her historical account of Cakaudrove Province,

> Subordinates of the Tui Cakau thought of them (and other members of the i Sokula lineage) as sacred, the descendants and representatives of the ancestor-gods and as such gods themselves. This ideology asserted they ruled by right, not by might; and Fijian paramounts are believed, still, to hold their position because their right has been prescribed.

As Sayes's elucidates, the traditional authority of the Tui Cakau came from the belief that he and his descendants were demigods. Although the Europeans did not believe in the godlike status of Chiefs, they did acknowledge traditional authority figures. The British did so by establishing a Chiefly *class* that mimicked Britain's aristocratic model while also resembling the existing Fijian hierarchy (Campbell 1996; Kaplan 1995). By doing so the British were also able to minimize opposition since the newly established administration solidified Chiefly authority by favoring those who were already in positions of power (Kaplan 1995).

The Tui Cakau then became a unique hybridization of traditional Fijian rule and colonial rule. To the Fijians, the Tui Cakau's demigod status made him and his descendants legitimate leaders. Yet, Gordon's formal bureaucratization of his authority made stagnant the social standing of the Tui Cakau. The title maintained authority amid the transition from paganism to Christianity when worshipping demigods became sinful (Lawson 1990). Although the high Chief's *political* power diminished, he is still recognized by indigenous Fijians as a traditional symbol of authority.

Cakaudrove Province's original chiefdom status is also reflected by the fact that in the early nineteenth century all of Vanua Levu was known as Cakaudrove. The importance of Vanua Levu started to dissipate amongst Fijians when the Tui Cakau moved from Vunisavisavi to the island of Taveuni, signifying a loss of status for Vanua Levu as a whole (Sayes 1984). However, to the Europeans, Cakaudrove still reigned supreme.

For Europeans, Cakaudrove's status was inextricably linked to its sandalwood reserve (Lawson 1990). Similar to the Fijians, Europeans formally referred to Vanua Levu as Cakaudrove, but informally called it "Sandalwood Island" because it was the *only* island where sandalwood could be obtained (France 1969; Lockerby 2011; Melillo 2015). Fiji's sandalwood stock attracted European traders who flooded to the region in search of the valuable resource (Melillo 2015). An 1808 testimony of a sandalwood trader, William Lockerby (2011:8-9) illustrates the response of Europeans amid the *discovery* of Fijian sandalwood:

> At Port Jackson we were informed that Sandle-wood had been found in the Feegee Islands; which is an article of great value in the Chinese market, the natives making use of it, on account of its strong smell, to burn on their altars and over the bodies of their deceased friends. We are therefore determined to these islands for a cargo of this wood.

Lockerby's mentality to use the islands as a cargo aligns with colonial perceptions of extractive peripheries whose link to the rest of the world is tied to its exchange of natural resources (Bunker 1984). Often times these regions are politically significant during peak times of extraction, but are eventually left with nothing but exploited ecosystems. This was the case of Cakaudrove, whereby its political importance was contingent on its sandalwood reserve. When the commercial stock of sandalwood became nearly obsolete,

its significance with European traders also declined (Melillo 2015).

This brief history of Cakaudrove Province illustrates the ebb and flow of local hegemonies. For indigenous Fijians, Cakaudrove's significance was representative of a traditional hierarchy, which dissipated when the Paramount Chief physically moved to Taveuni. To the Europeans, the region's political organization was contingent on Vanua Levu's availability and profitability of its raw material supply.

The island of Vanua Levu as it is today has little instrumental value to those who live outside of the region. It is a vast reserve of *un*developed land, much more than Viti Levu, the majority of which is classified as mataqali land, meaning the government cannot implement any development projects without permission from the landowners. For this reason, the government is providing agricultural grants, and encouraging people to utilize the land through the kava trade (Interview Exchange).

Fiji's complex land tenure structure makes Vanua Levu unimportant to external development forces. But the island has inherent value to the Fijian people. As I stated previously in this dissertation, the importance of land is encompassed in the term *vanua.* Roughly translating to land, spirit, and a relationship with the past. Beyond the importance of land, in and of itself, are cultural relics that memorialize Cakaudrove's historical significance. Vunisavisavi, as the initial residence of the first Tui Cakau is home to one of Fiji's cultural heritage sites, the *Lalagavesi*.

## 7.3 The Backbone of Cakaudrove

"Our Chief says, if we move Cakaudrove loses its history."

–Turaga Ni Koro of Vunisavisavi

I first heard about the Lalagavesi during an interview with an Assistant Roko Tui in the Provincial Office. I was in Savusavu on my way to Vunidogoloa, when I stopped into the Provincial Office to interview an Assistant Roko about the relocation of Vunidogoloa. Similar to other interviews, we deviated from a conversation on Vunidogoloa to Vunisavisavi. He then discussed Vunisavisavi's cultural barrier to relocating in which he mentioned the Lalagavesi,

> There is a landmark that puts a historical site of the history of Cakaudrove. When we do the formal [kava] ceremony we always mention the name of that place. The stone what I heard from other villagers was brought from the other side of Fiji. They carried it to that place. When we present the *yaqona* we always mention that stone.

He further explained that this stone *is* the history of Fiji, "It's the Lalagavesi. That's what he [Chief] said. If we shift the village to another place, we lose our historical story. It's because of that historical site."

When I first arrived in Vunisavisavi, I immediately scanned the area for the Lalagavesi. I had a vague idea of what it was, but assumed it would be a grandiose monument. I expected it to be monumentalized with plaques, or erected in a way that symbolized its importance. I also anticipated that it would have a written history. Yet, similar to other oral cultures, histories, narratives, myths, and origin stories are rarely physically documented (Clanchy 2012). For this reason, I relied on the story of the Lalagavesi, as told by the Turaga Ni Koro. When I inquired about the landmark, he took me and my research assistant to six large stones formed into a circle, located just a few

feet away from the coastline. He proceeded to tell us,

> There was a war and it was coming closer to Cakaudrove. If someone like the Tongans came here, and they [Fijians] failed then this land would belong to the Tongans. It was a tribal war.
>
> These guys here, the Tongans, went down to Macuata. The people from Macuata, not the people, but the Gods. In Fijian, we call them the *Vu*. It's a spirit. They are our protectors.
>
> The Vu from Macuata asked for help here from Cakaudrove, so the Cakaudrove Vu went and helped the Macuata people to protect them from the Tongans. To thank them they brought this stone. This is the stone from Macuata, Labasa. They brought this to thank Cakaudrove. The foundation is the Lalagavesi. Whatever [is built] has to be around the Lalagavesi.

The Turaga Ni Koro continued to explain the cultural significance of the stones, referring to it as the "Backbone of Fiji." As the community of Vunisavisavi, they are culturally obligated to act as the caretakers of the Lalagavesi. The story of Vunisavisavi and the Lalagavesi signifies the less discussed threat climate change poses to cultural heritage and value of place (Fatoric and Seekamp 2017).

In 2005, the World Heritage Committee wrote a report publicizing the debate on the impacts climate change has on cultural heritage (Droste zu Hulshoff 2014). The report drew attention to some of the well documented socioeconomic and ecosystem processes that are negatively impacted by climate change, but it also raised concerns regarding the degradation of cultural heritage sites (UNESCO 2006). *Cultural heritage* in this context is often discussed in relation to the preservation of *tangible* artifacts (Brabec and Chilton 2015; Fatoric and Seekamp 2017). Most of which are being jeopardized by the impacts of climate change. For example, sand encroachment is decaying the Mosques of Timbuktu in Mali, sea level rise is degrading the coastal city of Venice, and around the world shifting weather patterns are disturbing archaeological sites (Droste zu Hulshoff 2014).

The fact that heritage organizations are intervening to repair damage postdisaster, and prevent future damage of monuments, buildings, and relics, reflects the concern and severity of the threat climate change poses to built landscapes (Barthel-Bouchier 2012).

Less discussed in the literature is heritage as a *cultural landscape* (Barthel-Bouchier 2012). In the 1990s, The World Heritage Committee broadened its definition to include landscapes. The expansion of heritage beyond monuments has played a vital role in illustrating the interconnectedness of human and natural systems (Barthel-Bouchier 2012). It implies that heritage is not just a physical marker, but a reflection of past history and present values, attitudes, and culture (Brabec and Chilton 2015). By including landscapes, it thus includes the tangible and intangible remnants unique to that specific place. This conceptualization of heritage recognizes that climate change is altering natural landscapes to the degree that it impacts their instrumental *and* intrinsic value. Some of these landscapes are rapidly and visibly deteriorating—the Saint Elias glacier of Alaska is melting, Australia's Great Barrier Reef is exposed to coral bleaching, and the diversity of the Galapagos Islands is being altered due to extinction and shifting migration patterns of birds and pests (Droste zu Hulshoff 2014).

The deterioration of these landscapes represents a discussion on values through an *ecosophy* approach. According to deep ecology philosopher Arne Naess (1973:99), ecology is limited in its ability to only focus on scientific methods whereas ecosophy is a "philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium." He goes on to argue, "The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only 'facts' of pollution, resources, population, etc., but also value priorities" (Naess 1973:99). Naess, as the *founder* of the deep ecology movement, emphasized a need for an ethical

approach towards sustainability through an *ecocentric* paradigm. This means that the ecosphere (i.e., individuals, species, habitats) has inherent value giving it the *right* to exist (Devall and Sessions 1985). Deep ecologists, therefore, perceive the contemporary environmental crisis as a decay of character and culture, advocating for a reprioritization of value structures to remedy ecological degradation.

Critics of the deep ecology perception point out its vagueness. Criticizing its philosophical approach for lacking any practical implementations (Devall and Sessions 1985). Along with this criticism is the notion that values are subjective. However, Naess had deliberate reasoning for taking an ambiguous approach. This is exemplified in the third principle in *The Basic Principles of Deep Ecology* (Naess and Sessions 1984), "Humans have no right to reduce this [ecosphere] richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs." They elaborate, "The term 'vital need' is left deliberately vague to allow for considerable latitude in judgment." He thus accounts for social change by recognizing that what may be a *vital need* in contemporary times was not vital one hundred years ago. While deep ecology gives a vague philosophical approach to values, Danielle Endres (2012) discusses the incommensurability of values due to cultural differences.

Endres's research on Yucca Mountain focuses on the role of conflicting cultural values in environmental decision-making processes. Her case study examines the controversial decision to use Yucca Mountain as a nuclear waste site. She draws attention to the multiple social constructions of Yucca Mountain. For instance, American Indian tribes believe that the mountain is sacred land. To the U.S. federal government, it is a proposed nuclear waste site, and recognized as an environmental sacrifice zone. The controversy around the waste site is partially due to concerns about toxic waste, but it is

also representative of irreconcilable cultural values evident through fundamentally different understandings of Yucca Mountain as a place. This raises the question Endres (2012) poses: how do environmental conflicts account for cultural values?

Vunisavisavi and the Lalagavesi parallels deep ecology and the Yucca Mountain controversy. As a landscape and a habitat, Vunisavisavi has the right to exist. As a cultural heritage site for Fiji, the settlement has the right to exist. Lastly, as the home to the community, the settlement has the right to exist. Yet, according to the community, USAID representatives conducted an environmental assessment, prior to the construction of the houses, projecting that if the coast continues to erode at the current rate, the settlement will be under water in less than 50 years. This section details an inability of adaptation measures to account for the cultural and intrinsic value associated with Vunisavisavi and the Lalagavesi. The only way to minimize intangible losses from climate change is through mitigation efforts, which requires a restructuring of values.

## 7.4 Conclusion

This chapter draws attention to the less documented cultural and value dimensions of climate change. By focusing on the ecological history of Cakaudrove Province as a resource for the British, I illustrate how construction of place is associated with its instrumental value. Yet for indigenous Fijians, Cakaudrove and Vunisavisavi specifically are revered for their cultural value. From a perspective of instrumental value, losses associated with Vunisavisavi and the Lalagavesi can be quantified. From a perspective of intrinsic value, the loss of the area signifies the loss of history. Thus, it raises a fundamental concern with technocratic and economic solutions to the impacts of climate

change, such as the inability to account for nonmonetary variables associated with intrinsic value and culture.

# CHAPTER 8

# CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this dissertation, I discussed the implementation of the National Relocation Guidelines as one of the symbolic acts of the Fijian government's attempt to take a leading role in climate change politics. By offering refuge to South Pacific Island neighbors and financially and bureaucratically assisting their own rural communities, the Bainimarama administration was being described as proactive, altruistic, and nuanced in its adaptation efforts to mitigate the impacts of sea level rise on coastal communities. As the first government in the world to propose the creation of a relocation policy, they were also changing the discourse surrounding mobility as an appropriate response to ecological degradation.

The perception of relocation as an adaptation has seen major shifts through time. I show in Chapter 2 when discussing Vunidogoloa's original site in the mountains that mobility is one of the oldest responses to ecological degradation. Moreover, South Pacific Islanders are an inherently mobile culture with constant movement between rural-urban and rural-rural areas. Yet, at some point migration became a "failure to adapt," despite numerous historical accounts including that of the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma (Kelman 2014; Oliver-Smith 2012). Now as climatic changes are making areas increasingly less hospitable it is conceived as a viable adaptation (Kelman 2014; Oliver-Smith 2012).

Interestingly, relocation is being treated as a nuanced adaptation effort, but the only difference between past and present forms of mobility are the demarcation of land boundaries and government intervention.

Regardless of if one perceives relocation as a progressive policy or a repackaging of *the* original adaptation effort, Fiji did receive widespread national and international attention for its National Relocation Guidelines. As I stated earlier, the National Relocation Guidelines were supposed to be formalized in January 2016. This may have been an overambitious feat with the upcoming Conference of Parties 21 in December 2015 in Paris. However, as of October 2017, they were still left unfinished with no projection of when they would be formalized, or if there was still an intention to create them. What does this mean for future relocations in Fiji?

## 8.1 Future Relocations

The three relocations presented in this dissertation occurred independently of the National Relocation Guidelines. However, Vunidogoloa and Narikoso were still government-assisted projects. Vunisavisavi was assisted by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which according to a USAID representative plans on funding future relocations if they are necessary in which the organization will abide by Fiji's National Relocation Guidelines (Interview Exchange). This implies an expectation for a need to relocate coastal communities, but it is unclear as to if relocation projects will continue independent of the proposed guidelines.

Substantiating the above statement regarding a need to continue to relocate coastal communities was Cyclone Winston. On February 20, 2016, Cyclone Winston, the

strongest cyclone recorded hit Fiji (Noy 2016). Outer islands of Lau and Taveuni were hit the hardest, but rural villages throughout the islands experienced some degree of damage. The aftermath of Winston showed the damaging effect more frequent and intense storms will have on less-developed countries. The economic costs alone were staggering with damage to property and crops. However, the true impact on the country's GDP is still being quantified due to costs associated with rebuilding and losses associated with crop yields.

The immediate aftershock exposed indirect costs natural disasters have on society's well-being. Communication infrastructure was down leaving local government offices isolated from each other. Locals were left in a state of uncertainty about the safety and status of their friends and families. Water had to be delivered by humanitarian relief agencies for a week in Suva, and longer in the rural areas. Markets were nearly empty for a month following the cyclone because crops were destroyed resulting in high prices of crops that survived the storm. People were also left stressed and confused as to what the cyclone meant for the future of the islands. Winston created a public response of fear and anticipation contributing to a reemergence of the relocation discourse.

The relocation discourse peaked as Fiji was preparing for Conference of Parties 21, it subsided post-Paris, and reemerged post-Winston. Cyclone Winston created what one NGO worker described as "hysteria." In an interview, he spoke about rural villages flooding the government with requests to relocate. There was apprehension on the part of the Ministries to abide by the requests. It had only been a month since the storm, and the influx of requests were interpreted as an emotional reaction to Winston. This raised concerns that relocation was not being perceived as the "last viable option." Instead

communities were seeing it as the first response, moreover, most of the requests were described as unnecessary. Cyclone Winston altered the approach to relocation, although precautionary, it was being perceived as a pre-precautionary measure.

The period between Conference of Parties 21 and Cyclone Winston also marked a political move in the Climate Change Division. During this time, Fiji's Climate Change Division shifted from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Economy. The director was also replaced with a trained economist, who wanted to prioritize cost-benefit analyses of the relocations. For this reason, in March 2016, relocations as a response to coastal erosion were at a halt. Exempt from this was the partial Narikoso relocation, which will continue to be carried out by the German INGO, GIZ.

Vunidogoloa, Narikoso, and Cyclone Winston raised concerns about the proposal of the National Relocation Guidelines. People had different responses to the guidelines, pointing to the fundamental need of a relocation policy, but also erring on the side of caution. As, I stated earlier in Chapter 4 an NGO worker spoke about the trajectory of his thought process with regard to the relocations. He spoke about how, initially, he was in favor of them under the premise that a formal process would prevent individuals from going into villages and making false promises to communities. After seeing how the relocations were being implemented, he became hesitant to support them on the basis that once a policy was created, relocation would become an option. However, it was not being implemented properly.

Interviewees spoke to two contentious areas to the relocation efforts. First, as I discussed in Chapter 2 there was concern over the standard housing model. The cyclone houses provided to Vunidogoloa were argued to be an inadequate housing structure in

that it did not provide women with privacy, and it was left unfinished. Second, despite the presumption that relocation is the *last* viable option, many interviewees saw it being treated as the *first* viable option. These were only two of the cautionary tales visible from the Narikoso and Vunidogoloa relocations. Others were mentioned throughout the chapters in reference to the ecological degradation wrought on by conducting the relocations without a proper environmental assessment, or written contract to identify who is going to be in charge of which element of the relocation.

## 8.2 Relocations

Throughout the dissertation, I draw attention to the particularities of the different organizing principles in the community relocations. But what connects the three communities? There are the obvious nuances—they are all rural, coastal, Fijian communities facing coastal erosion. All three transferred some autonomy to either the government or supporting agency by allowing external stakeholders to make decisions the community is usually responsible for. This includes the structure of the house and the layout of the new site.

In Chapters 2, 4, and 6, I describe the communities illustrating some of the demographic variables that corresponded with degrees of “modernity.” Vunidogoloa and Narikoso were described as more traditional compared to the youth that comprised Vunisavisavi. The consequences of the more traditional structure coincided with the omission of women from being part of the decision to relocate, whereby the political marginalization of women on the local level was often associated with *tradition*. However, Vunisavisavi’s youthful demographic illustrated how the appeal to tradition

was associated with a generational trend. Vunisavisavi is still *traditional* in the sense that they would not relocate because of a cultural obligation to the Lalagavesi, but they did not abide by all elements associated with *tradition*. For example, women in the settlement had an equal vote in the decision to allocate funds for water or coastal erosion. There were characteristics that were described as *modern ideals*, such as women's rights, and this was seen as tension between *tradition* and *modernity*. Yet, Vunisavisavi is an example of how what is sometimes seen as a traditional-modern binary is merely a social change. It is difficult to identify what mechanisms account for changes and stagnation in different societies. For example, the exclusion of women from village votes did not occur in Vunisavisavi. However, in all three communities, the local hierarchy acted as the sole decision-maker for the decision to relocate.

Fijian villages are highly stratified in regard to gender and social standing. In Narikoso and Vunidogoloa it was the village leaders, which includes the elder men, Chief, and Turaga Ni Koro. In Vunisavisavi, it was the Chief who lived on the neighboring island of Taveuni that would not allow the community to relocate. Interestingly, in Vunidogoloa and Narikoso the ones who advocated for the decision to relocate actively proclaimed the decision to move was democratic, arguing that men, women, and youth all voted to relocate the village. Whereas, those omitted from the decision were less hesitant to discuss their non-role.

While there were some similarities, there were also drastic differences between the communities. These were illustrated in Chapters 3, 5, and 7. The discussion on gender inequality, religious interpretations of environmental degradation, and cultural ties to place was a theme that emerged in all three case studies, but it was more evident in some

cases over others. In addition, all three of these particular aspects coincides with a broader social problem throughout the islands. For example, Fiji's patriarchal structure exists independent of relocation, but in Vunidogoloa it acted as a rationale to exclude women from the decision to relocate. Likewise, cosmological explanations for ecological degradation are pertinent across the South Pacific. In the case of Narikoso, the religious discourse shaped the way in which people perceived relocation as a viable adaptation. Lastly, elders fear a loss of culture arguing that the youth are disinterested in Fijian traditions including storytelling and mat weaving. Most even feared a transition in beauty standards with Fijian women wearing pants instead of the sulu. As shown in Vunisavisavi, coastal erosion poses an *additional* threat to the loss of culture. Moreover, the Lalagavesi show how relocation as an adaptation is limited in its inability to compensate for the loss of intrinsic value tied to place.

I discussed how relocation manifested as a process paying attention to how the organizing principles led to successes and failures in the three communities. The important part of the analysis draws from the work of James Ferguson (1990). The interesting question is not, how are the relocations failing, but what are the relocations doing? The answer to this is intertwined in the subtle nuances tied to the guiding principles of relocation as an adaptation, which is embedded in the national and international discourse of climate change.

In one realm, Fiji's stance on climate change is an example of its creation as an environmental state. The relocation guidelines are thus one way in which the national government is strengthening its bureaucratic power over the local population under the premise of climate change. In another realm, the government's attention to relocation as a

technocratic solution is symbolic of the overall shift in the climate change discourse from that of mitigation to adaptation.

## 8.3 Environmental State

In the beginning of the dissertation, I discussed some of the supplemental resources to the National Relocation Guidelines. These include documentation of geographic vulnerability, social vulnerability, and access to natural resources, independent of if the community requests assistance with relocation. To reiterate, the Fiji government was in the process of documenting the vulnerability of every Fijian village *and* its natural resource supply. This has a transparent economic and political component coupled with an underlining political agenda of making the invisible, visible.

Simply put, Fijian villagers own their land *and* any resources within its boundaries. Because of the land tenure structure, the government cannot develop mataqali land without a lease from the village. Furthermore, there is no government documentation of raw materials on iTaukei land. By documenting village's vulnerabilities *and* natural resources under the umbrella of climate change adaptation assistance, the government is making visible unused raw materials and undeveloped land. Along a similar vein, the proposed extraction of valuable resources to fund relocations creates a rationale for government access to raw materials that historically belong to the people.

The Fiji government's approach to relocation is similar to the creation of an environmental state (Goldman 2005). As Michael Goldman's (2005) research on the greening of the World Bank illustrates, the emergence of the environmental state is creating new authorities granting more control to government entities. By making the

claim that natural resource extraction and development is in the best interest of the community, the Fiji government is able to extend its reach to communities' natural resources. Moreover, the government is able to minimize opposition by creating a *need* for development of the land. Yet, it is clearly contradictory that the government plans to implement ecologically unsound practices in the form of mining and logging to fund an environmental adaptation caused by unsustainable practices and policies.

The possible repercussions of government intervention with relocations cannot be presently identified. Yet, numerous studies including Goldman (2005) and Arun Agrawal (2005) illustrate the consequences of creating an environmental rational subject. By rationalizing stakeholder intervention in previously autonomous affairs, more powerful actors have been able to transfer agency, make decisions, and access resources that traditionally belong to the public. This research cannot confidently say whether this is the intention or *not* of the Fiji government, but processes such as the ones illustrated throughout this dissertation have led to a community's loss of autonomy over its livelihoods and resources.

While I find it important to point out Goldman (2005) and Agrawal's (2005) research on implications of an environmental state, I want to emphasize that this dissertation is focused on 2015-2016. In addition, it is centered solely on the perspectives of those involved in the relocation, including external stakeholders, but more importantly the communities who are/were forced to move inland. The unintended (or intended) consequences of Fiji's National Relocation Guidelines may not reveal themselves for years to come. The point-in-time approach of my research is limited in that it only shows how the relocation efforts are affecting villages in a specific context and national and

international climate. Yet social forces are dynamic, so a more accurate depiction and telling of relocation in Fiji would require a longitudinal study and a revisiting to the islands.

While there are limitations, there are a number of strengths to this research. The most visible asset this study provides is from the fieldwork and interviews with villagers. Both of these methods unveil the dynamics and complexities of the village relocations. Moreover, they identify the limitations of relying solely on government accounts and media portrayals that were increasingly attempting to diffuse any contentious aspects of the relocations.

### 8.4 Climate Change Adaptation

On a broader scale, Fiji's relocations illustrate a shift in climate change discourse. It signifies less attention to mitigation and more attention to adaptation. This is also representative of an acceptance of technocratic fixes to ecological degradation. In some respect, redirecting attention away from mitigation policies is complacency with the business-as-usual model. It is acceptance of the existing power structure that is contributing to ecological degradation. By deserting the push for mitigation policies, the international community is also abandoning the possibility of an ecological revolution that calls for a reprioritization of values.

At the same time, the shift from mitigation to adaption is drawing attention to Fiji's new normal. The degree to which villages throughout Fiji are experiencing coastal erosion to the point of having to relocate exposes the prevalence of coastal degradation. It is an island wide environmental issue. Vunidogoloa, Narikoso, and Vunisavisavi are not

exceptions to the rule; rather they are the new rule.

## 8.5 Environmental Politics

This dissertation draws attention to the multiple dimensions of climate change. For most South Pacific communities, climate change manifests itself as coastal erosion. It is a physical process. It is a scientific discourse. It is unjust. It is global. It is political.

The Fijian government and Vunidogoloa, Narikoso, and Vunisavisavi are receiving widespread attention for the (partial) relocations. However, the magnitude of attention directed at adaptation *de*politicizes the conversation. It draws attention away from the processes that are reinforcing coastal erosion. This raises the fundamental question: how do underdeveloped countries continue to push for mitigation policies *and* adjust to an increasingly unpredictable environment?

It is crucial to understand the political nature of this research. As is shown throughout this dissertation, Vunidogoloa, Narikoso, and Vunisavisavi are not *a*political byproducts of climate change and sea level rise causing displacement. Rather, these three case studies identify the complex ways in which international discourses and funding opportunities dictate national level priorities. This dissertation reveals a lack of government accountability, media framing, and complex interactions between the political, social, economic, and cultural. In this, migration is immersed.

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