

RESEARCH ARTICLE

VEIROGOROGOCI: Re-IMAGINING A ‘WHOLE OF LIFE’ HISTORIOGRAPHY FOR PASIFIKA HISTORIES: A *BARAVI* DECOLONIAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This paper aims to problematise the historiography of the narratives of Pasifika histories of Christianity from an indigenous Fijian decolonial perspective. Most histories of Christianity in Pasifika are Eurocentric histories as they were framed and constructed by Western and colonial missionaries’ approaches and perspectives. The paper concentrates on John Garrett’s narrative of Fiji’s Methodist history in *Footsteps in the Sea*, in which he recorded the changes in Christian missions in Pasifika and the emergence of self-governing Island churches, particularly during the post-World War II period. The problem that emerges constantly in the narrative are silences, representations whereby the indigenous voices, culture, and knowledge are being sidelined or misrepresented. This made the narrative a colonial tool of suppression, identification, and modification. In response to the historiographical issues, the paper presents an historical method from the Fijian context to reconstruct and re-story the history of Christianity in the island of Ono-i-Lau as an alternative history. The rationale is to let the people tell their own histories rather than relying on outsiders or colonisers to do the work for them. This is a way of healing and rediscovering indigenous values, culture, and knowledge that were downplayed by hegemonic colonial projects.

Keywords

historiography, eurocentric histories, silences, representations, suppression, colonial identification and modification, re-storying, alternative histories, healing, re-awakening.

Introduction

Histories, particularly colonial and mission histories, are so powerful that in one way or another they have overwhelmingly influenced the thinking and doing of those whose stories are narrated. In a sense, this may be regarded as the colonisers’ “political tool or a tool of power, either to the exploited or to the exploiters based on the narration of it” (Rahat-Oishy and Sarker-Shama 2024, 42). However, in this article, history is viewed as a significant tool for healing, reawakening, and reviving Pasifika indigenous voices and stories that were sidelined in mainstream mission narratives.

This view is underpinned by the Baravi perspective, which aligns with the ‘whole of life’ understanding. Baravi is basically the shoreline, the point where the land and ocean meet in a respectful embrace, in a *veirogorogoci* (mutual listening) way. Perhaps the notion of respect, embrace, and mutuality upholds a balance between the Western missionary approach and the Pasifika indigenous community-based approach. The Baravi decolonial approach used here affirms the ‘whole of life’ vision where the two different approaches (Western and indigenous) are understood in a *veirogorogoci* perspective as part of each other and not as binaries. This perspective critiques the missionaries’ one-sided approach but, at the same time, acknowledges the opportunities that have evolved from the previous narrative to reconstruct an alternative narrative from an indigenous point of view that captures untold stories and unheard voices.

This article examines John Garrett’s narrative of Fiji Methodist history in *Footsteps in the Sea*, where he recounts the changes in Christian missions in Pasifika and the emergence of self-governing Island churches. Garrett’s work has been widely recognised as foundational texts because they contain rich vital accounts of the development and progress of diverse Christian missions across the Pasifika region. However, the main issue in this narrative is the one-sided approach of historiography that depended mainly on archival materials which were based on the Western missionaries’ accounts and perspectives.

Retrospectively, from a Fijian perspective this one-sided historiography is problematic and destructive, or “*vaka e tale na ua ni loka*” (like the receding of a tidal wave). This Fijian proverb is normally “said of those who, upon returning from visiting a place, take with them everything they wish to take” (Raiwalui 1954, 7). In a way, Garrett’s one-sided histories destroy the images of Pasifika indigenous people and communities. That stated, this article is not intended to rule out the significance of Garrett’s work and his contribution to Pasifika histories of Christianity. This study aims to highlight the shortfalls of one-sided or single approaches and to argue that, in order to produce a comprehensive and balanced narrative, an alternative indigenous approach is required. Hence the concept of *veirogorogoci* is a pathway to re-imagine a ‘whole of life’ historiography for Pasifika histories.

Historiography of Fijian Histories and Methodist Mission Histories

Stories of Fijian peoples’ past have been preserved in memories that are deposited in folklore, legends, myths, and indigenous knowledge for centuries. These sources are still useful today, as “many Fijian societies still practice oral transmission, preserving diverse stories with cultural significance” (Lancini et al. 2025, 7). Each tribe and clan acknowledges and upholds its own stories with pride, and these stories guide the way they think and act.

Pasifika written histories before Jim Davidson’s era are imperial histories. Neil Gunson claims that Davidson “turned imperial history on its head” (1992, 4) in the mid-1950s when he introduced the concept of island-centric history at the Australian National University. In 1991, a three-day Pasifika Islands History workshop in Canberra highlighted the emergence of a renewed vision of doing Pasifika history among Pasifika historians. The vision indicated that Canberra no longer controlled the terrain of Pasifika histories (Hempenstall 1992, 61). Brij Lal asserted that “the centre has been de-centred” (1992, xi). The established epistemological foundations and frameworks of Pasifika histories that “were conceived in the western imagination” (Ashcroft 1993, 175) were being challenged. The narratives of histories of Christianity in Fiji were constructed and grounded on these same foundations. However, the new generation of Pasifika historians envisioned a fresh direction for Pacific History (Raman 2015, 41).

In Fiji, outstanding works that followed the new direction were written by Jacqueline Ryle, Robert Nicole, and Kirste Close-Barry in the early twenty-first century. These works paved the way for a fresh understanding and analysis of narratives of Methodist histories in Fiji. The invaluable insights they offered provide a clear direction for this article. Ryle's (2001) work on the interwoven paths of Christianity and tradition in Fiji is a masterpiece of anthropological analysis of two key aspects of the Fijian people, namely "tradition" and "Christianity."

Ryle unpacks the overarching influence of colonialism and Christianity on the Fijian traditional social structure. She states that the contemporary Fijian social structure is the result of an imposed restructuring of the traditional structure to ease the administration of the colonial government (Ryle 2001, 23). Indigenous Fijians generally accepted Christianity as the new mana and spontaneously incorporated it into the Fijian social structure, such that the missionaries became advisors to the chiefs (Ryle 2001, 25). Ryle's in-depth understanding of the interwoven paths of Christianity and tradition in Fiji and how it contributed to the national crises from 1987 to 2000 testifies to the historiographical shift that was happening in the time of her writing.

Nicole's *Disturbing History* (2011) demonstrates his transformed perspective of history in his approach to archival sources. He uncovers the nature of resistance in Fiji between 1874 and 1914 and discusses who rebelled, what they were disaffected about, why they resisted, how they went about challenging their opponents, and what happened to them as a consequence. This is an aspect of Fiji's history that was sidelined in the two previous phases of history writing. His reading against the grain, concentrating on voices from below, is groundbreaking historiography.

Kirstie Close-Barry's *Divided Mission* was published in 2015. Close-Barry realised from her fieldwork that the Methodist mission in Fiji was very much a part of the colonial landscape, and that the colonisers played a large role in fostering the divisions between the indigenous and Indo-Fijian communities which we still see in Fijian society today. This is another unique piece, an exhaustive study of colonial categorisation and influence in Fiji's Methodist Mission that triggered racial tensions in Fiji.

The works mentioned above followed a different direction as far as the narrative of Fiji Methodist Mission histories was concerned. Their works signify a growing consciousness and concerted effort to decolonise Fiji's Mission histories. This article builds on their contributions, while focusing on Garrett's narrative of Fiji's Methodist Mission histories. The intention is to deconstruct his narrative and offer an alternative history arising from the stories and voices that were sidelined in mainstream histories.

Garrett's Narrative of Fiji Methodist Christianity History

Garrett's *Footsteps in the Sea* was published in 1992, the second of his three-volume series of Pasifika histories of Christianity. This book was written during his tenure as a lecturer in History of Christianity at the Pacific Theological College (now Pasifika Communities University).

Downgrading Fijian Ways of Life

At the beginning of his narrative of the history of Fijian Methodism, Garrett appears to be rather dismissive of local people's ways of life. Words like "custom" and "practices" are typically used by the West to undervalue non-Western cultures. Note the subtle tone of denigration in the latter part of this quotation:

Material support of the church was assured by regular ceremonies, the *vakamisioneri* collections, in village after village. Saleable produce—coconuts, oil, mats and many other gifts—were presented in these *solu* (freewill offerings) in the presence of chiefs and ministers (*talatala*). Gordon's administration regarded these events as forms of ecclesiastical taxation; they objected to them; in reality they replaced pre-Christian customary practice in the presence of chiefs and their priests (*bete*) with new sacral arrangements. (Garrett 1992, 155)

Garrett's reference to Gordon's comment on the replacement of pre-Christian customary practice demeans the Fijian way of life. Gifting and presentations of first fruits (*sevu* or *sigana*) to the chiefs in Fijian culture is a relational and religious obligation known as duty or *i tavi*, which literally means 'to share,' signifying that the "chief of a village is accorded precedence and respect within the village" (Nation 1978, 6). The practice was never a missionary invention but an old religious tradition appropriated by the church. Although Garrett quoted from Gordon's administration report, he made no allowances for a change in wording, hence denoting a Eurocentric attitude of belittlement. Arguably, reading Garrett's description through a *vaka e tale na ua ni loka* perspective, the Eurocentric attitude of demeaning Fijian culture is critically destructive.

The earliest missionaries who were deployed in the Pasifika islands around the late 17th century normally referred to the people's way of life as "tradition," "custom" or "practices" rather than culture. Helen Gardner detected this when explaining the views of the Spanish Jesuits missionaries who arrived on the island of Guam in 1688. According to Gardner,

European missionaries found it hard to understand and describe the lives of the people they encountered. From high lands to coral atolls, priests and reverends reported back to Europe on the polity, the religion, or the kinship of the peoples with whom they worked, using terms such as 'tradition,' 'custom' or 'practice,' or their Spanish, French, or German equivalent, often prefaced with 'primitive' or 'savage'. (2023, 349)

Gardner noticed how the Spanish Jesuit missionaries viewed Guam's people's traditions, custom, or practices as primitive and savage, a clear depiction of degrading and devaluing long-existing Pasifika cultures. Garrett fell into the same Eurocentric pattern of belittling Fijian culture by using the words "customary" and "practice" (Garrett 1992, 155). According to Gardner, the English-speaking missionaries viewed "culture as refinement and the attainment of civilization. It was reserved for the higher classes and almost exclusively to Europeans" (Garrett 2023, 349). In the missionaries' view, culture is superior to custom and practice. In using custom and practice, Garret was classifying Fijian ways of life as inferior to the European way of life, a Eurocentric way of demeaning Pasifika ways of life.

Garrett's description of the Victorian colonial Methodist missionaries' attitude in controlling the Fijian Mission revealed another trait of colonial belittlement of Fijian culture. He writes,

After 1855, when the British Methodism transferred control of the Fiji mission to Australia and New Zealand, the missionaries from those colonies were Victorian colonial Methodists. Sporadic revivalism and moral respectability were features of their culture. Methodists opposed the use of tobacco, dancing, theatrical entertainments, and—by 1900—all forms of alcohol. (Garrett 1992, 156)

In these lines, Garrett indicates that the Victorian missionaries brought with them the refined culture of Western civilization. He goes on to point out other indigenous practices, such as sexual mores and mixed dancing (*taralala*), that were strongly condemned by the missionaries. He offered a straightforward account of the missionaries' efforts rather than a rigorous critical analysis of the missionaries' attitudes and their teachings

and practices that were “accepted without question” by the Fijians (Garrett 1992, 156). Again, Garrett falls into the inclination to classify Western culture as superior to Fijian culture. Such a binary approach follows the Hegelian systematic philosophy “based on racist philosophical anthropology ... that is thoroughly Eurocentric, whereby every other continent falls necessarily behind that of Europe itself” (Tibebu 2011, xiii).

Representations

Representation is a predominant problem in Eurocentric discourses and histories. Edward Said in *Orientalism* described representation as a Western technique of making the Orient visible and clear through representations of “‘there’ ([an ‘othered’] presence) in discourse about it” (Said 1978, 22). According to Said, Orientalism is the study made by Western scholars regarding the Orient. Amal Chatterjee attests that “the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Chatterjee 1998, 5). Chatterjee’s comment supports Said’s contention that the Orient is a European construction or “production of the Other” (Spivak 1988, 24). Such fabricated and sophistic construction distorts the reality of the cultures and people represented.

Garrett’s narrative encompasses a number of representations of the Fijian people and culture. His description of the physical appearance of the people is a case in point:

Fiji’s 300 widely spread islands are culturally poised on a border between Polynesia and Melanesia. The dark and muscular physique of many Fijians seems Melanesian; the structure and expectations of the pyramidal societies, grouped as confederacies under paramount chiefs, are Polynesian. Some anthropologists have called Fijians Polynesians in a Melanesian skin. (Garrett 1992, 155–156)

The classification of Pasifika islands into the three categories of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia is a colonial construction. Garrett followed the usual colonial practice of differentiating Pasifika people based on physical appearance and culture. As Nitasha Sharma aptly argues, “White people carved this vast oceanic world into categories of race, appointing Melanesians as the Black people of the Pacific because of their dark skin and curly hair” (Sharma 2021, 38). Garrett overlooked and misunderstood the diverse complexities of the identities of the peoples of Pasifika, and such labelling has influenced Pasifika people’s view of themselves.

According to Margaret Jolly, “Indigenous visions have, since the late eighteenth century, been challenged and partially transformed through encounters with the imagined” views of the colonisers (Jolly 2007, 509). Garrett based his views on scientific conclusions of anthropological studies (Garrett 1992, 156), resulting in the common Eurocentric racist and “Polynesian in a Melanesian skin” (1992, 156) are characteristic of deceitful representations.

Garrett’s reference to Fijian ways of life as “easy rhythms of Fijian farming, hunting, fishing, kerekere (spontaneous sharing) and communal exchange” (Garrett 1992, 157) is another evidence of wrongful representation. His reference to Fijians’ ways of life as “easy rhythms” indicates his deficient understanding of communal life in Fijian indigenous communities that is centred in deep cultural and spiritual meaning. Perhaps he perceived the Fijian ways of life as incompatible with the norms of financial enterprise, accounting, and investment underpinned by the capitalistic market system. I argue that Garrett misunderstood the fundamental groundings of the Fijian communal systems that are not governed by cash and profit but by a strong sense of relationality and spirituality.

An attribute of one-sided representation is clearly seen in his account of the adoption of the British tradition of Christianity, as in “the presentation of ‘loyal address’ to the British throne. Queen Victoria’s official image—moral matriarch and protector of Protestantism—was accepted without question” (Garrett 1992, 156). He also mentioned the “adoption of ‘Anglican liturgical standards’ and the introduction of trivial ‘sacred songs and solos’ from the hymnals of Moody and Sankey and Chapman/Alexander revivals within English speaking Protestantism” (1992, 158). In so doing, Garrett yielded to the Eurocentric inclination to foreground the impact of British Christian traditions. I argue that this inclination led to numerous prejudicial representations that overshadowed indigenous elements in Pasifika islands Christianity.

Silences

Silences are also common in Garrett’s narrative. Silences creep into the process of historical production at four critical moments (Trouillot 1995, 26). These moments include “the moment of the making of *sources*, the moment of the making of *archives*, the moment of the making of *narratives*, and the moment of the making of *history* in the final instance” (Trouillot 1995, 26). One vital aspect of these moments is the historian’s choice of the stories to tell, and this is where silences arise.

Garrett’s opening lines about the coming of Christianity and the involvement of Fiji’s highest chiefs encompasses a number of silences. One example is his statement, “Tongan missionaries, with others recruited in the easterly Lau group of islands in Fiji, deferred to chiefs, especially the highest chiefs” (Garrett 1992, 155). This is a very general and one-sided Eurocentric recollection, particularly since “missionaries” specifically refers to white missionaries, and the names of the Tongan native missionaries were omitted. Josua Mateinaniu, a Fijian who was very influential in the introduction of Christianity in Fiji, was likewise not recognised. Garrett missed a lot of crucial information about indigenous leaders, men and women, who laid the foundation of independent churches. His silence regarding influential indigenous peoples’ names and their roles does not do justice to their stories.

Garrett’s citation of Cakobau as the highest chief in Fiji does not provide the full picture of political leadership in Fiji. The Fijian Methodist historian Tevita Baleiwaqa (2003) insisted that the title Tui Viti (King of Fiji) came out of Rev. William Cross’ pen. Fiji had never had a king or a unified political system, as various groups had their own similar but respective political systems. In citing Cakobau as the highest chief and Fiji’s paramount military conqueror, Garrett (1992, 155) followed the Eurocentric propensity to exalt an imperial model of Christianity, excluding ordinary men, women, and young men who contributed immensely to their communal life.

Further silences are noticeable in the account of developments in the late 19th and early 20th century. Garrett concentrated solely on the effort of the missionaries in organising the structure of the mission to cater for the native Fijians’ needs and those of the Indian indentured labourers. He dedicated a paragraph to the works carried out by certain missionaries:

Langham, who had been the Wesleyan chairman on Bau for more than twenty-five years, retired in 1895; he went to England to revise the translation of the Fijian Bible. His successor William Lindsay made way in 1899 for Arthur James Small, an experienced English-born missionary who had been in Fiji since 1879. Small set his stamp on the Wesleyan Church as surely as Langham had done. (1992, 157)

This narrative focused entirely on the works of the English missionaries but was silent on the native missionaries’ labours in the interior of the larger islands and in the outer islands as well. One example is Osaiase

Qalova, who was one of the native teachers that served among several hill tribes of Namosi and Ba during the time of Thomas Baker's death in 1867.

In recounting the progress that took place at the turn of the twentieth century, Garrett directed much of his attention to the response of the Methodist Mission to the issues faced by the Indians, who had been brought to Fiji from India by the British to work as indentured labourers on their sugar cane plantations. He devoted five pages to discussing the missionary work amongst the Indians, but mainly the work done by the English missionaries like John Wear Burton and a female missionary named Hannah Dudley. A portion of the narrative that describes the situation of the Indians and the response of the missionaries reads as follows:

Hannah Dudley did not raise her voice in protest; she left denunciation and reform to the prophets. The role of political and social watchman devolved in the years before 1912 on her fellow-missionary John Wear Burton, who went to live near sugar estates and mills at Nausori, 20 kilometres east of Suva. Burton confronted the system; Hannah Dudley addressed herself to gathering part of its human fallout into the nucleus of a small Fiji-Indian church. (Garrett 1992, 158–159)

Here Garrett offers a passionate reminiscence of the horrible dehumanising situation of the Indians and the courageous response by the missionaries Burton and Dudley. While their efforts signify a vital development of the Methodist Mission, the narrative is silent on the colonial strategy and ideology that shaped what Close-Barry called the divided mission structure that “included the development of categories that defined ethnic divisions and hierarchies” (Close-Barry 2015, 1). Efforts by indigenous Fijians and local Indians that likely took place during the same period were left out. Garrett also discounted the contribution of the people of Navatu throughout Fiji in preparation for the autonomous Fiji church, which began around the time of World War II.

Silences are problematic when they marginalise people, stories, and voices. The problem with Garrett is mainly his choice of sources and stories; his selection appears to be based on his “Big Man” approach. This makes his narrative prone to multiple silences because of the biases in approach and methodology. As Kevin Olson reminds us, “Silences constitute a systemic problem of archival evidence, testimony, voice, and information about the lives of those people who are most marginalised and subordinated in society” (2023, 92). The silences in Garrett's narrative contribute to the systemic problem of marginalising Fijians by leaving them in a fixed status of subordination.

The Damage Inflicted by Vaka e Ua Ni Loka (Eurocentric) History *Ongoing Colonial Identification and Suppression*

Colonial identification is embedded in representations that are prevalent in Eurocentric discourse. Colonisers are fond of giving names or labels to the colonised to identify and differentiate them from the coloniser by making contrasts. Construction of colonised identities is a crucial constituent of colonialism. As Serap Turkmen rightly states, “Identity is one of the indispensable components of colonialism, if we consider colonialism as a body; identity constitutes its spirit while the economic exploitation is its corporal body” (2003, 188). Turkmen's comment suggests that identity is a fundamental tool that colonisers used to position the colonised in a subordinate status. This occurs by constructing imagined demeaning identities of the colonised or the construction of the “other.” Robert Young (2001) describes this in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. The process, according to Young, involves

... do[ing] away with the institutions and cultures that have already been developed ... [the] reduction of everything. ... The territory and cultural space of an indigenous society must be disrupted, dissolved, and then reinscribed according to the needs of the apparatus of the occupying power. (2001, 82)

The doing away of institutions and cultures means relinquishing the original identities of non-Europeans by imposing colonial designations such as “dark, uncivilised, primitive, infant, backward, lazy, dangerous.” This is done intentionally to discredit their indigenous beliefs, enforcing the idea that they need to do away with their own cultural ways of being and doing in order to adapt to the coloniser’s ways. Turkmen offers further insight in his assertion that the aim of colonial identification is to make “people feel that colonialism is not an unfair perpetration; rather, it is a necessary drive, ... and these people do not deserve these lands by virtue of their notorious traits” (2003, 190).

However, this decisively promotes and establishes the colonisers’ standards to serve their own interest while indigenous cultures and traditions are being suppressed. Chris Kortright elaborates when he says, “Colonization or the colonial complex started with a forced or involuntary entry whereby the colonizing power modifies basically or destroys the indigenous culture” (2011, 5). These are all part of colonial identifications that modify or destroy indigenous cultures, or what Albert Memmi calls the “colonial situation that manufactures colonialists just as it manufactures the colonized” (1965, 56). This process has destroyed both the lives and the cultures of the colonised and fostered a culture of destruction of both peoples and the natural environment.

Colonial identification operates in Eurocentric or colonial discourses, particularly in historical narratives and in “concepts and representations used in literary texts, travel writings, [and] memoirs” (Young 1994, 191) that are used extensively as sources for historical narratives. The Pasifika historian Peter Hempenstall rightly argues that “there are thousands of ‘stories’ underpinning colonialism, thousands of ways historians and others have constructed the native through their texts” (2000, 47).

Catherine Walsh concurs with Hempenstall, writing that the colonisers recreated a new “history, plurality, and social, cultural, economic, spiritual, territorial, and existential foundation of these lands, making it—by naming it—a singular unit seen and defined from the European gaze” (2018, 22). Hempenstall and Walsh agree that colonial constructed identities of the colonised are ratified and embedded in Eurocentric discourses about them. We clearly see that traits of colonial identification are visible in Garrett’s *vaka e tale na ua ni loka* narrative of the history of Fiji Methodist Christianity, where local people, cultures, knowledge, spiritualities are suppressed.

The Pasifika scholar Steven Ratuva contends that “discursive branding through ‘naming’ is a way of shaming as well as drawing a tight boundary around a group” (2019, 7). This degrading attitude conditioned Pasifika peoples to disregard or bury their identities, cultures, and ways of life, internalising colonised standards which resulted in the suppression of their identities and cultural traditions. Ratuva also offers an intriguing observation on the impacts of objectification with regards to ethnicity as a form of sociocultural identification. He asserts that social issues in Fiji regarding class, power struggles, resources dispersal, historical grievances, human rights abuse, marginalisation, and discrimination make resistance to objectification a potent force for political mobilisation (2019, 2). Objectification, like identification, has functioned as a political tool for suppressing marginalised groups. When Garrett’s work is examined through a *vaka e tale na ua ni loka* narrative lens, its suppressive nature becomes evident, requiring a reconstruction from a Pasifika indigenous perspective.

Epistemic Tragedy

Epistemic tragedy is understood as the continuing destruction of indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing by the internalised tolerance of Eurocentric or colonial narratives. The concept builds upon Spivak's (1988) notion of epistemic violence, which refers to the denial of space for the marginalised to speak for themselves. However, the notion of epistemic tragedy as used here is the continuing tolerance of existing *vaka e tale na ua ni loka* narratives that disregard indigenous knowledges and epistemologies in neocolonial contexts. Eurocentric approaches and methods of writing history have long been accepted as the most relevant way of constructing historical narratives, while others are deemed unreliable. This is truly a tragedy for indigenous epistemologies.

Pasifika indigenous ways, philosophies, knowledge, and ways of knowing were subjugated and displaced by Eurocentric narratives. Since the introduction of Eurocentric education and ways of doing history during the Christian mission and colonial era, Pasifika indigenous philosophies, knowledge, and epistemologies have been pushed to the margins. Epeli Hau'ofa noted that by the 1980s, the 'Canberra school' of Pasifika historians had conceptualised and reconstructed our pasts based on "the temporal division of the past into precontact, early contact, colonial, and postcolonial or neocolonial periods" (2000, 455). According to Hau'ofa, "In this formulation, Pasifika had no history before imperialism, only what is called 'prehistory,' 'before history'" (2000, 455). This is to say that Pasifika peoples' history only began during the encounter with the Europeans.

Even more objectionable is the classification of what our forebearers valued as our life stories as what is now referred to dismissively as myths and legends. Vilisoni Hereniko calls this "the usurpation of oral narratives by the dominant culture's narrative fiction: fairy tales, myths and legends, short stories, novels, and biblical stories" (2000, 82). By overriding indigenous knowledge with dominant Eurocentric narratives, as Haunnani-Kay Trask rightly explains, "they seek to take away from us the power to define who and what we are, and such theft testifies to the stranglehold of colonialism and explains why self-identity by Natives provokes strenuous and vicious denials by members of the dominant culture" (1991, 162). Eurocentric narratives are indeed the stranglehold of colonialism that has continuously denied Pasifika indigenous epistemologies' legitimacy, hence my argument that Garrett's narrative is emblematic of epistemic tragedy.

Western Cultural and Ideological Hegemony

The dominant Eurocentric narratives have contributed immensely to the persistent domination of Western culture and ideology in neocolonial contexts. As the Tongan poet and educator Konai Helu Thaman has stated in her discussion of Western discourse and power,

What we might perceive to constitute Pacific studies [knowledge] therefore constitutes a type of power exercised over those who are 'studied' or 'known,' and those who produce the discourse [that is, we] have the power to enforce its validity and its scientific status and make it true. (2003, 3)

Thaman affirms the relationship between discourse and power in Pasifika studies. Most of these areas of study have been designed by non-Pasifika people using Eurocentric ideological framings. "Pasifika studies, therefore, like all types of university studies, continues to be dominated by Western, scientific, and liberal thinking" (Thaman 2003, 4). Since Western academics are managing Pasifika knowledge systems, they are still in a commanding position to subjugate and control Pasifika peoples. Tagataese Tupu Tuia expresses this reality from a Samoan perspective, focusing on education as a case in point:

Education is a major colonial influence on the Samoans. ... Inadvertently, the global changes Samoa experienced meant the role of education in the western world was duplicated in this small island nation. It also marked the era where western knowledge and lifestyle were assimilated into the school system. This blend has not been without problems as cultural values and norms have been severely tested. (2019, 53)

Tuia's comment indicates the domination of Western knowledge in Samoa's educational norms. Similarly, Eurocentric histories of Christianity in Pasifika have been a colonial tool that has shaped and influenced Pasifika theological students' ways of thinking.

Towards A 'Whole of Life' History of Christianity in Fiji: A Veirogorogoci History

The urge to construct an alternative history of Christianity in Fiji by using Fijian indigenous concepts and perspectives builds on Michel Foucault's assertion that "each society has its regime of truth ... types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (1980, 131). Recent Pasifika scholars have encouraged and supported the use of indigenous concepts, traditions, and philosophies as a framework for constructing new narratives. Hence, an indigenous Fijian veirogorogoci historical approach to re-storying Fiji Methodist Christianity history is employed here to recount a story from the most remote island in Fiji, called Ono-i-Lau.

Veirogorogoci is a "body perspective" (Vaai and Casimira 2017, 3) based on the Fijian indigenous worldview. The veirogorogoci perspective makes the narrative a people's history rather than a "Big Man" narrative. It incorporates oral traditions in sources such as arts, language, life stories, places, rituals, and ceremonies. This approach aligns with Bertolt Brecht's "history from below" coined in the 1930s (de Oliveira and Courrier 2021, 1) and Ben McCullagh's (2004) "responsible or bottom-up history" that foregrounds the stories of the people.

A Baravi Narrative from the Margins: A Case Study

The story of the arrival of Christianity on Ono-i-Lau Island is not captured in Garrett's work or by the Fiji Christian missions historian Harold Wood, but it has been preserved by the people Ono-i-Lau for generations. This history is referred to as a veirogorogoci narrative from the margins partly because Ono-i-Lau is located literally on the margins of Fiji, the farthest island distant from other Fiji islands. It is also the closest island to Tonga.

Jone Dausiga of the mataqali (clan) Bukani, in Nukuni, Ono-i-Lau shared this story: "E dua na turaga ga mai na neitou mataqali, na tukai keimami o Sailosi Wai a tiko voli mai Toga cabe yani na lotu. O Sailosi Wai vata tikoga qo e vakayaca kina o Sailosi Kepa qai mai turaga ni lewa e muri, qai vakabula yaca tale kina o tamai keitou gone duadua me yacana o Sailosi Vakacabelotu. E kauta mai na lotu na turaga na tukai keitou qo e sega tu mada ga ni kila nai cakacaka ni lotu. Tukuna o koya mai talanoataka vei tuakana na tui Ono, kaya va qo e dua ka au kauta tiko mai Toga e dua Kalou era qarava tiko mai Toga ra bula kina a tamata e sega ni laurai a kalou era sa vakabauta, ia ra masuta ra bula kina a tauvimate, ruru kina a cagi cabe kina a sautu kina a vanua. Qai taroga a tuakana a Tui Ono se vala vakaevei a masu, qai kaya ko koya era cuva sobu na yadredra me tara na qele, ra qai masuta a kalou, mani kai me valata a masu mai tawa kila ko koya ai valavala ni masu, qai kacivi tale mai na bete ni lotu ena gauna ya, qai kacivi mai na bete sa qai mai nona qaqa ni masu: 'Kemuni na Kalou mai lomalagi ni vosota niu se vakanadakui kemuni tiko, ia au sa cavuta yani vei kemuni na nodra masu era sa vakabauti kemuni.' Mai cava na masu ya. Ni sa mai vakadewataki nai talanoa ni cabe ni lotu vei noqu tata era qai tukuna vu ani yabaki ga ka cabe kina a lotu mai Toga e cabe talega kina a lotu e Ono. Ia na yabaki 1826

koya cabe kina mai Toga. O Toga o Ono rau veivolekati toka ga koya sa mani vakadeitaka kina neitou tata na yabaki a cabe kina na lotu e Ono mani mai vola talega kina.”

The English translation is as follows: *“One of the men from our clan, he is our great-grandfather, named Sailosi Wai, was in Tonga when Christianity arrived there. He brought the lotu [Christian religion] but he did not know how it was practiced. He told his elder brother, who was the king of Ono at the time, ‘I have brought something with me from Tonga. There is a god that the people of Tonga have been worshipping. They could not see him, but when they prayed to him, he saved the people from sickness, calmed the storms, and brought prosperity to the land.’ The King of Ono asked Wai to pray but he could not for he did not know how to pray. Then the priest of the traditional god was brought and told to pray, and the priest then prayed, ‘Dear God, forgive me for turning my back on you. However, I am offering this prayer to you on behalf of those who believe in you.’ That is the end of the prayer. This is the story of how my great-grandfather learned about the lotu, and how the lotu made its way from Tonga to Ono. This was in the year 1826, when he made his way from Tonga to Ono. Tonga was really close to Ono-i-Lau. This is the true story of when the lotu made its way to Ono-i-Lau, so it must be written.”*

Let them Tell their Own Stories; Let their Voices be Heard

The *veirogorogoci* narrative approach allows the people to tell their own stories. Dausiga is the great-grandson of Wai, the man referenced in the story who was responsible for introducing the lotu to the people of Ono-i-Lau. Here Dausiga shares fresh memories of a significant act of his forebearers in their history. This story is a reminder to the generations of Bukani of their forebearers’ self-determination in searching for opportunities for a better life. Dausiga also relayed that in 1991 the people of Bukani erected a memorial stone to commemorate this event, and it was blessed by the President of the Methodist Church in Fiji (MCIF), then Rev. Isireli Caucau. He said, “Caucau was the first ever MCIF president to have visited Ono-i-Lau and he came in time to bless the memorial stone. We have also witnessed God’s favour and blessing in our clan, which is the fruit of what our forebearers had done” (Dausiga 2024).

Peoples’ stories and voices can be heard when they are given the opportunity to construct their written narratives. The *veirogorogoci* approach aptly provided this opportunity in capturing Dausiga’s story in the Fijian language. Dausiga revealed that the introduction of Christianity was entirely the responsibility of the local people, as it was introduced by Wai and his elder brother, who was the King of Ono, and the bete (indigenous priest) around the year 1826. This happened without any missionaries’ involvement.

The involvement of Dausiga’s forebearers makes the narrative unique and different from the dominant mission narratives that are mainly about the “white man’s contact” (Nabobo-Baba 2004, 22). This approach contributes to resistance against ongoing colonial domination through neocolonial systems and structures in academic research and writing.

Valuing Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Culture

The *veirogorogoci* narrative also upholds indigenous ways of knowing and culture. It foregrounds stories kept in oral traditions that encompass stories, genealogy, art, names of people and places, and nature. Dausiga draws from these sources while narrating the story of his great-grandfather. Firstly, he briefly recalled their genealogy by starting his narration in this way: “O Sailosi Wai vata tikoga qo e vakayaca kina o Sailosi Kepa qai mai turaga ni lewa e muri, qai vakabula yaca tale kina o tamai keitou gone duadua me yacana o Sailosi Vakacabelotu” (Dausiga 2024).

Genealogy is a central mode of preserving stories, as shown in Dausiga's story, in which he briefly paused to explain the lineage from his great-grandfather to his uncles, identifying them by name. Such a pattern makes the narrative more profound because the stories are kept alive through different interwoven sources—lineage, relationships, and names. Dausiga's uncle's second name, Vakacabelotu, literally means "to bring or introduce the lotu," pointing to that past event when Wai brought the lotu from Tonga. Archival materials tend to solidify stories and meanings as absolute and stagnant, whereas indigenous sources, such as genealogies and naming practices, allow meanings to remain dynamic and responsive to context. The ownership of Eurocentric history belongs only to authors, archives, or libraries, while Wai's story is a community asset which is now kept by his descendants and the people of Bukani, as custodians of the story.

In the retelling of such consequential narratives, proper traditional protocol need to be respected and carefully followed to ensure that the community gives its consent and permission for their stories to be used in academic research or writing. I received such permission from the Bukani clan after presenting the appropriate Fijian protocol to Dausiga at Samuela Moceituba's residence in Nakasi. Dausiga, as an elder of Bukani, received the presentation on behalf of his people. Even though he is Wai's great-grandson, he acknowledged the larger family—the clan of which he is a part.

This process ensures that community knowledge and cultural values are acknowledged and respected. The *baravi indigenous approach* challenges destructive discourses and "offer[s] radical alternatives ... [that] restore historical agency to cultures and communities" (Dei, Sefa, and Rosenberg 2000, 87). This enables Pasifika historians to critique the Eurocentric Enlightenment scientific method "with which we are in sympathy, enough to subvert [it]" (Spivak 2012, 4). Indigenous knowledge and values are vital agencies of finding and restoring life, in a way that overturns colonial approaches, while empowering indigenous communities.

Conclusion

This work brings to light the problems of Garrett's Eurocentric or *vaka e tale na ua ni loka* history of Christianity in Pasifika. It detects how that work is connected to imperial or colonial domination that is destructive to Pasifika indigenous cultural values, knowledge, and ways of knowing. The Eurocentric narrative embedded in Garrett's well-meaning history of Pasifika Christian history has been influential in conditioning Pasifika peoples' and communities' ways of thinking and doing, which has lured them into imperial suppression and colonial historical crimes.

As an alternative method, the *veirogorogoci* decolonial approach can be used for re-righting and re-writing histories of Christianity in Pasifika. The spirit of the *veirogorogoci* embraces oral traditions, enduring cultural values, wisdom, and indigenous agency to root Pasifika histories of Christianity in Pasifika contexts. Re-rooting makes newly expressed narratives a means of cultural and intellectual "recovery, renewal, and re-awakening" (Meyer 2013, 249–260) from ongoing colonial suppression, marginalisation, and extraction to ensure wholeness and wellbeing for the 'whole of life' in Pasifika.

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