

BOOK REVIEW

UPOLU LUMĀ VAAI AND AISAKE CASIMIRA, (EDS.), *RE-STORYING THE PASIFIKA HOUSEHOLD*

Dr Eyingbeni Humtsoe-Nienu

Professor of Christian Theology at the United Theological College, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. eyingbe@gmail.com

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The book is very much a part of the larger experience of indigenous uprootedness by colonial powers—either political or religious—and the persisting neocolonial developmental and capitalistic agenda. The book opens with an apt poem, entitled “The language of trees and clams,” that laments the replacement of the language of nature with the noise of modern machines. Jenny Te Paa Daniel provides an inspiring “Introduction” to the book, rightly alluding to the breaking of silence through the many forms of voices spoken in the articles therein.

The details of how and why the publication came to be are apparent in the first chapter, “Pasifika Household—its Discontent and Agency.” Theresa Fox and Aisake Casimira did a great favour for the readers by explaining the terminologies specific to the book and common to the people of the Pacific, particularly the Pasifika household (Pacific region) and Pasifika households (nations across the Pacific Ocean). The relationship between the two is pointed out as organic, as it is historical.

The shared reality of past and present makes a strong case for solidifying familial relationships and mapping common issues such as climate change, cultural shifts, poverty, leadership patterns, healthcare, human rights, and ecclesial alienation. Juxtaposing the households’ concerns, the writers respond with indigenous principles of ecocentrism, wholesome development, dignified economy, partnership in governance, collective responsibility, community identity, and relationality respectively. The overall invitation is “... to strengthen the Pasifika household’s resilience, sustainability and agency, much more than agreements, ... understanding that wellness and wellbeing concepts have deep roots in Pasifika household traditions.”

In the first chapter, “Abraham and the ‘Curse’ of James Cook,” the author, Afereti Uili, projects the discovery and exploration narrative of Abraham in the mode of Captain Cook, the archetype of all “discoverers” to follow, as a colonial “curse.” The metaphorical “curse” is that of the imposition of European religion and culture in Oceania that remains extant, to their detriment. The question of whether the curse can or should be reversed is left open. The essay ends by commending the resilient indigenous values that have survived “the tides of empire,” with which to create new decolonised stories of the Pasifika communities and nations.

The essay by Jione Havea is titled “Covenant: Chosen, Cover, Contest.” It challenges the biblical notion of covenant that favours one against the rest. He then calls for an alternative reading that works under three C’s. First, readers need to engage with narratives in which God favours a “chosen” people and justifies displacing and dispossessing the people of the land (Gen 6–9; 12:5–6b). Second, readers need to remove the “cover” of the powerful who directly benefit from the covenant—even if by lies and treachery—and put the

burden of covenant on the marginalised (Gen 20–21). Third, readers need to hear the voices of protest in between the covenant events as indications of a bilateral relationship gone awry (Gen 6: 1–7; Ex 3: 7–9). Beyond the Bible, Havea shows that there are texts that stand against a patronising posture of the colonisers and protest events that cry for justice for the creation, as well.

Upolu Lumā Vaai authors the fourth article, “We are Earth’—reDIRTifying Creation Theology.” He begins by questioning the Christian creation story that engenders a human “egological” control, and calls for birthing a new earth-based theology by returning to the Pasifika “dirt communities.” This involves “dirtification”—a triad investing in spaces of identity, consciousness, and frameworks for liberation and self-determination. These concepts are developed to formulate a creation theology of reDirtifying with the following argument: Firstly, the “wild thinking” of the peoples of Pasifika has led to them being branded as backward and pagan, yet it is to the wilderness that the Spirit led Jesus as an (alter)native space of value (Jn 4:1ff). John embodied the wilderness (Mk 1:4–6) and was even killed for it. This contrasts the “paradisaical thinking” from which many are moving out and “re-wildering.” Secondly, as descendants of the dirt, dirtification is the self-identification of the Pasifika people who are deeply rooted in dirt or earth and who have a placental connection from birth. Dirtified thinking enables connections between the marginalisation of the dirt people and ecological bodies such as land and oceans. Care and restoration for both is crucial. Thirdly, a “plural I” or an “ecological We” constitutes multiplicity, against the “singular I” which gave rise to centring the *imago dei* in rationalism and humanism extending to colonisation. Relationality to earth is being earth in the Triune Aiga.

In the “New Ecumenism: A Negotiated Space,” Tevita Havea argues that a new generation of people and reality necessitates a new idea of ecumenism for the Pasifika household. He conceptualises “negotiated space” as separation, cosmological and relational, and thus develops a theology of ecumenism. Conservation of forest areas is separation for the natural world to rejuvenate, whereby human community is also renewed within itself. The author contends that the cosmic and interrelational worldviews of the Pasifika people ought to inform all dimensions of life.

Manulani Aluli Meyer’s essay, “Spirituality Centred Around Aloha/Pono: A Discipline of Love and Truth,” begins with this summary line: “The manifestation of Spirit is through loving, and if our society is bereft of one, we are without either.” This is embedded in the spirituality of Aloha/Pono—the loving and truth dynamic—seen as a discipline, she maintains. The practice of love of land and service to others, in the context of conflict, are projected as strivings of the Hawai‘ian people.

In “Custodianship: Re-righting Ecological Ethics Towards Sautu,” Sereima Naisilisili critiques an individualistic-capitalistic mentality while juxtaposing it with the relational Fijian identity with the whole ecosystem—the vanua, the end of which is sautu—the shalom. She further states that being good custodians of the ecosystem is to ensure that every life form is an invaluable part of the same ecological system, knowing that each affects the other. Theologically, this means that the earth is everyone’s home, including God’s.

“Collaboration or Collusion? The Need for the Pacific Churches/Household to *Tēu le Va*” by Lupematasila Melani Anae seeks an integration of the Bible and the Samoan holistic code of ethics (Solo o Le Va), within the larger question of it being disrupted by colonialism, Christianity, or capitalism. The silence from the pulpit on the comprehensive Samoan code is addressed by a calling to embrace this integration, while also questioning those contextual theological interpretations that project biblical ethics as in conflict with Samoan codes of daily living and conduct.

Kabini Sanga's "The Mala'ita LABU: Rescripting the Politics of Living Well Together" reimagines the LABU, a village of safety, in the light of issues confronting Pacific Islanders in general, with the goal of "living well together." Reducing the significance of the LABU has resulted in the suffering of the people and the environment. The recommendation is to restore the LABU on the principles of justice, membership, worship, and neighbourliness, which is necessary for securing a future where all live together, and well.

Arnie Saiki's essay, "Pasifika Economics: Towards our Navigational Star Line," turns to the Pacific's ecological assets to navigate global engagements on an equal footing. Economic wellbeing with Pasifika values is posited as crucial for enhancing the lives of native peoples and sustaining the inherent wealth of the region. While recognising the limitations of traditional economic systems, Saiki also suggests that without sensitivity to these indigenous frameworks, global trade systems will lack direction in structuring an integrative ecological economy.

In the final essay, "Rethinking Pacific Education for the Future: Cultural Wellbeing and Youth Resilience for Sustainable Pacific Societies," Frances C. Koya Vaka'uta presents a local indigenous approach to education, with a view to making Pacific Islander young people more resilient and sustainability conscious. The colonial method of education needs revamping to make it "contextually relevant" and "culture inclusive," keeping in mind global educational goals.

The volume closes with a conclusion that recognises the importance of integrating the multiplicity of voices across the Pasifika household, a vision that echoes shared aspirations for reclaiming indigenous concepts to address contemporary issues. Almost all of the essays in the book call for a new way of thinking and doing theology with Pasifika resources, which have been shown to be of immense wealth and value. This volume deserves global readership and engagement, not only to understand the history and creativity of the Pasifika communities but to learn from the wisdom ways that promote mutual care and relationality among humans, other-than-humans, and all of creation.