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BOOK REVIEW

UPOLU LUMĀ VAAI AND AISAKE CASIMIRA (EDS). 2024. *THE 'WHOLE OF LIFE' WAY: UNBURYING VAKATABU PHILOSOPHIES AND THEOLOGIES FOR PASIFIKA DEVELOPMENT.*

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I have been following the recent work of Pacific Theological College (PTC), now Pasifika Communities University (PCU), in this space of developing Indigenous Pacific—or Pasifika as the editors say—philosophies and theologies, and I have marvelled at the sheer determination, collective vision, and sense of mission shown. What they have undertaken is not easy work, and not work they can do alone. But they have done a superb job with this publication. This book is testament to PCU's dogged commitment to a shared, Indigenous-inspired vision, collective ethic and purpose for the region and the world.

The timeliness of this book cannot be understated. It reclaims and centres in development discourses, what Maori legal scholars Sir Eddie Durie and the late Moana Jackson have called right-relations and whakapapa—the right to live and be in good or tika and pono relations with each other and the 'whole of life', and a spiritually-based relationality. This is core to the indigeneity thesis promoted by this book.

The book recognises that the indigenous and Indigeneity are, as any socially constructed phenomena, both generative and contested. As Mohawk and Cherokee nation scholars, Alfred and Corntassel have stated, the Indigenous and Indigeneity are things that are 'constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism' (2005, 597) and that notwithstanding, there is value in using these terms nonetheless as key organising concepts that can help transcend the constraints and bleak trajectories of modernity.

This sentiment aligns nicely with the wonderful chapter by Kumar and Sharma on 'Sustainability, Climate Change and Coconuts: A Hindu Mythological Perspective'. They propose use of Dussel and colleagues' 'transmodernity' theory to help situate and progress Indigeneity and Indigenous-led and defined development, which they say avoids being ahistorical or becoming trapped in what Upolu Vaai describes as 'oneification' (I encourage you to buy and read the book to gain an understanding of what the Reverend means by that). This chapter gifts us, in the wider Pacific, access to the richness of Hindu myths about the coconut and I am struck by how similar their whole of life themes are to those of Pasifika cultures.

Kumar and Sharma's illuminating chapter, when read alongside all of the other chapters within this text, show us, in nuanced and analytically sophisticated ways, just how similar and different our stories and whole of life values are as Indigenous communities. Their chapter underlines the point that notwithstanding our differences there is a significant space— 'a third space' they suggest— for revealing what renowned Hawaiian philosopher Manulani Aluli Meyer describes in her chapter as 'mutual emergence'. The inclusion of Kumar and Sharma's chapter in this book, and their voice in Pacific regional and global dialogues on development and sustainability, reflects both a maturing of our regional identity politics and of our collective Pacific thinking about Pacific Indigeneity.

Before I continue, however, I should make a few disclaimers. I am not a theologian, nor am I a formally trained philosopher. Rather, I come to this review as an avid and perennial student of the Indigenous. I am fascinated by the intersections of knowledge and power in the interstices of Indigenous and social science knowledge, especially in the Pacific and in criminal justice. I therefore come to this review as a critical Indigenous social scientist who seeks to bring her Indigeneity into deliberate conversation with her social science training.

I am a child of Indigenous Samoa whose pute (umbilical cord) is buried in the 'ele'ele (dirt, as Vaai says), of the village of Sa-o-Luafata, on this island, here in Samoa. My life journey and direction thus far seem somewhat destined to involve constant and active conversations with my ancestors. If I might add the 'ele'ele of Sa-o-Luafata is not only where our new Miss Samoa comes from; it is also where the best Samoan cricketers are from, and it is the place of the Fatumanava legend that Tui Atua describes in his riveting tour de force through the Manu'a Solo o le Va, detailed in his chapter in this book!

For scholars and students of the Indigenous and of development, this book is indeed a treasure trove. It offers profound examples of how to conduct, research, and teach a 'whole of life' way where content and processes are not 'buryable' or unable to be unburied without good cause.

If Indigeneity, as a subject position, is both historically situated and self-determined, then this book and its take on Indigeneity is, by definition, an open-ended conversation. What excites me about this text is the intergenerational scholarly and everyday conversations and learning it can and will afford. It will be an apt resource not only for university or higher learning courses, but also for development policy and law reform boardrooms and senior management teams.

I want to touch a little on the key concepts of 'unburying' and 'vakatabu' used in the title of the book and woven throughout. I do this by way of telling a little story, one that speaks directly to their importance and to their lived pluralities, complexities, tensions, and contradictions.

Aisake Casimira helps us to understand how the book applies the concept of 'unburying' and its significance. He notes that it is something that involves the 'finding of our voices in the darkness of the night'. Vakatabu, on the other hand, is a Fijian term meaning to slow down and reflect, to take time to rejuvenate and renew. This resonates with wider Indigenous wisdoms of restraint such as the tofa taofiofi of the Samoans, as discussed by Vaai and alluded to by Faafetai Aiava.

The idea of Indigeneity as an open-ended conversation recognises that there are multiple interpretations, theories and lived experiences of Indigeneity. It also recognises that some Indigenous experiences and traditions have been buried, unburied, and then reburied. The question arises: which Indigenous knowledges or traditions have been unburied? Then reburied? How has this occurred, where, when and why? As I pondered these questions, I was reminded of an experience my mother shared. It involved an altercation she had with her village council of chiefs. Before I share her story though, first let me say tulou.

I say tulou to anyone from my mother's village who may feel offended by this story or my rendering of it. In saying tulou I acknowledge the sensitivities at play and wish to pay respect to those sensitivities. But I seek your indulgence to tell this story notwithstanding because to me it aptly conveys the point about unburying and vakatabu in this contemporary moment. I tell my mother's story with her consent.

As I said, the story is about my mother's altercation with her village council of chiefs. This occurred after she disclosed certain information, she believed was right, during a land and titles court hearing about the origins of one of the paramount chiefs in her village. The issue arose because when she was asked by the Land and Titles Court judge whether the paramount chief in question *was of* the village, she said he *was not*. She explained that according to her family mau or oral history of their village constitution, the title had come to our village from outside. It was a gift from another village, the village of an in-law, whose family had bestowed the title on the recipient, and he had brought it

with him to our village, the village of his father. This originating ancestor was bestowed this foreign title in recognition of his long and self-less service to his wife's family. This disclosure unsurprisingly provoked some unhappy reactions, to say the least, amongst some of the villagers present in the courtroom. When the hearing was over, my mother was summoned before the village council. The words of their exchange as told to me by my mother have stuck with me.

In reprimanding her, the village council said: 'O oe o le teine o le nuu, ua e toe laga upu ua uma ona tanu' (You are a daughter of the village, why have you unburied that which has been buried?). To which she responded: 'O a mea ua tanu, ae aisea ua tanu ai?' (What has been buried? And why has it been buried?). My mother is now older than most, if not all, of the chiefs who currently sit in this village council.

If you know my mother, you will know that she does not shy away from provocations. She remains adamant that justice here required engaging in the act of 'unburying'. The council did not answer her questions about burying or unburying. Rather they left them hanging and imposed on her a hefty fine instead.

Her case of unburying family knowledge impacts village knowledge and nuances claims about the plurality, definitional parameters, and contestability of family knowledge, of village knowledge, traditional knowledge, Indigenous knowledge. And it raises so many other questions about right story and wrong story, stories of the peopling and settling of lands or villages, about Indigeneity and development, law and order, discipline and punish, knowledge and power, justice and restoration, and so on and so forth.

While unburying can reveal continuing colonialities and injustices, it can also, however, retraumatise and cause disharmony. Within this call to unbury, there is always present, a call for pause and reflection and for a search for the wisdoms of peace and harmony—of vakatabu.

For younger generations, our stories—those captured in this book and many more—are vehicles to help us/them make sense of ourselves/themselves and of our/their responsibilities to the whole of life. Understanding and engaging in vakatabu philosophies, and bringing them into conversation with other philosophical, theological and theoretical paradigms, offer rich opportunities for a much-needed 'authentic intercultural and intergenerational dialogue'.

I thank the editors and authors of this amazing treasure trove for this gift of service and love. The scholastic rigour of the deconstruction narratives contained within and the mana, alofa, and respect each author imbued into their storytelling is special and will live across generations.

There is legacy and hope in this work. The kind of legacy and hope that lies in the words of one of my favourite Albert Wendt poems:

I carry willingly the heritage of my Dead
my children have yet to recognise theirs.
Someday before they leave our house
Forever, I'll tell them: "Our Dead
are the splendid robes our souls wear" (2014, 354)

My final words in this review are words of dedication and hope: hope for the kind of authentic regenerative mutual intergenerational conversations this book will inspire. I dedicate this review to my maternal Aunt who passed away recently in Masterton, Aotearoa New Zealand. This book encapsulates all that she stood for. She was a second mother to me and instilled in me a love for all things Indigenous. She would have loved this book.

She was a fierce teine o le 'ele'ele, tama'ita'i o le nuu, daughter of Sa-o-Luafata, that is, the village and families of Luafata. To me she epitomised the mana of Sa-o-Luafata's traditional nuu o tamaita'i, its traditional council of the daughters of the village.

Unburying and restoring the traditional power of our nuu o tamaitai are things she would have loved to have seen done in her lifetime. However, it was not meant to be, nor will it be in my lifetime, but maybe in the lifetimes of my daughter or her daughter.

My Aunt's name is Na-o-upu (meaning 'only words'). The long version is Na-o-upu-ae-le-alolofa (only words but there is no love). There is a story and message in her name, one that is present in all of the stories of this wonderful book.

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