The Custodians of the Gift

Fairy Beliefs, Holy Doubts and Heritage Paradoxes on a Fijian Island

GUIDO CARLO PIGLIASCO

FIRENZE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Guido Carlo Pigliasco

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To Andrew Arno

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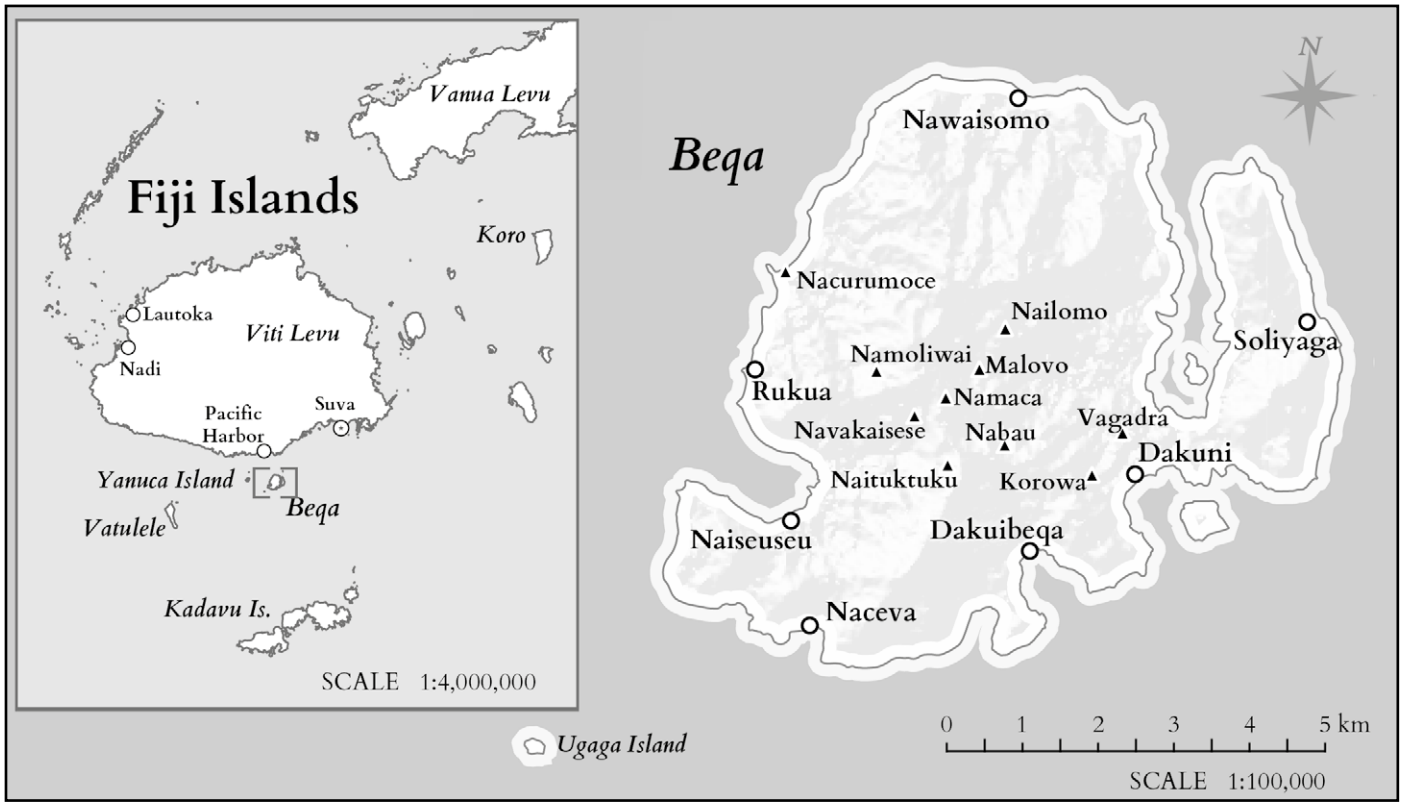

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FOREWORD

Sipiriano Nemani
Director Fiji Museum

During the launch of the Fiji Online Exhibition on the "Gift of Fire-walking" on the Google Art and Culture platform, held at the Fiji Museum verandah in December 2018, I commented to the Turaga na Tui Sawau and his people that there was always a space and time for everything. And the struggle by the people of Dakuibeqa to have their voices heard has finally come to fruition: "This is your moment, and the world has now come to know of this gift that holds significance to your community and importance to our nation."

The same can be accorded to this publication, and I am delighted to endorse and welcome this book as part of the Fiji Museum repertoire of literature collection. It is a pleasure to present the work of Guido Carlo Pigliasco, who accidentally visited the Fiji Museum some thirty years ago, ending up spending two decades researching Pacific Islanders' rights in cultural heritage and in particular those of the Sawau people of the island of Beqa.

At the Fiji Museum we are aware of the advantages of long-term field research, but also of how involvement over time transforms anthropologists, and how the continuum of stances from observer to advocate carries with it a concomitant range of ethical choices and dilemmas. Especially for ethnographers like Pigliasco, who chose to move into an advocacy role with *The Sawau Project*, a community project whose genesis and evolution is narrated in the last chapters of this book and which I was fortunate to have been part of.

In 2009, Pigliasco published a special issue of *Domodomo*, the journal of the Fiji Museum, on the Fijian firewalking ceremony (*vilavilairevo*). It was the first monographic work on the iconic practice on which a lot has been written in the past but very little scholarly work has appeared in modern times. We are pleased to see another five articles collected in this book to complete Pigliasco's long-term engagement with the Sawau community. These writings summate the Fiji Museum's interests in the Sawau Tribe of Dakuibeqa and affiliate villages, which are twofold—foremost are the taboos, stories, chants, and songs associated with rituals and rites accorded during the ceremony of the *vilavilairevo*, including its preparation and post-culmination of the ceremony. Similarly, the tangible components are core to the Museum's curiosity in such a cultural undertaking, and these are critical for the layman's understanding.

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Nevertheless, in this publication, Pigliasco's thorough archival work reveals how the Island of Beqa, sighted for the first time in 1799 by the American ship *Anne of Hope* on her return voyage from Australia, faced and survived a rapid succession of historical events. Marked by fratricidal battles and disputes, conquered and massacred by Rewa, subdued by Bau, and later occupied by Ma'afu's Tongan troops who deported its men to Lau. Claimed by Ma'afu, traded by Cakobau, property of the Polynesia Company for a short period, and eventually rejoined with the Colony of Fiji under the British Crown in 1874, unveiling to the colonial officers and to the world its singular ability of firewalking. This provides a rather stimulating perspective on local history which is worth articulating in our national narrative.

On a different level, this publication is a reminder not only of the tourist's predilection for the highly visual cultural performances typified by the *vilavilairevo* and how it has become a signature "brand" statement of Fijian culture, but how we are continuously challenged with misappropriation and misuse of the gift. Pigliasco's research and observance of such cultural abuse raises its visibility, and seeing the custodians or the *vanua* taking the lead in combating it is encouraging.

The unique and diverse character of Fiji's heritage including its ritualistic transformation impacting social practice and history is well documented, and the Fiji Museum highly recommends this publication for research and educational use in Fiji and across the globe. We congratulate Guido Pigliasco for this "gift."

Na vuna ga qo baleta qo e dua na isolisoli a solia o Tui Namoliwai ki vei Tui Qalita, Ia na kena vosa ni yalayala "na nomu kawa kece me yacova na rusa ni vuravura era na rawa ni vilaka tiko nai revo."

[*Vilavilairevo* was a gift given by Tui Namoliwai to Tui Qalita and there was some sort of oath made which states: "all your generations till the end of the world will walk on hot stones."]
— Samuela "Samu" Vakuruivalu (personal communication)

Figure 2. *26 January 2005*
The author with *bete* (traditional priest) Samuela Vakuruivalu, Rukua village historian Mika Tubanavau, and student assistant Laisiasa Cavakiqali in the upper Namoliwai river region, thought to be the source of the power to walk on hot stones, the place where in the legend the "gift" of *vilavilairevo* was exchanged between the Naivilaqata clan's ancestor and *bete* Tui Qalita and Tui Namoliwai. Tui Namoliwai is the "god of firewalking," head of the fairy tribe of *veli* inhabiting the Namoliwai rainforest. Photo by the author.

PREFACE

Thirty years ago, right after finishing law school, I went to Sāmoa. My flight to Apia via Nadi was delayed in Nadi's airport for several hours. While I was killing time with a trip to Lautoka town's market and back to the airport, my cab driver, Babu Ram, explained why the airport was overwhelmed: many Indo-Fijians were fleeing the country, seeing little future in staying in Fiji. The Indo-Fijian diaspora had started less than two years before on 25 September 1987, after an army colonel, Sitiveni Rabuka, staged his second *coup d'état*. Rabuka declared Fiji a republic on 7 October 1987, abrogating the Constitution of Fiji and declaring himself Head of the Interim Military Government. The Commonwealth responded with Fiji's immediate expulsion from the association, and the tensions between indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian ethnic groups were starting to crumble Fiji's model of biracial political harmony.

A month later, on my way back home from Sāmoa I decided to stop in Fiji again, and to spend a whole week in its capital city, Suva. Obviously, there were not many tourists around. Perhaps this explains why, with no reservation, I was able to get a large room, with a rusty fan and a lot of dust and nostalgia, in the Grand Pacific Hotel, Fiji's grand old lady on Suva's waterfront. Almost immediately after I left, the hotel closed down for two decades. When I asked the name of a solitary island whose silhouette was visible in the twilight to the south of my room, I was told it was called Beqa and was known in Fiji as "the island of the firewalkers." I was also told that, back in the day, the firewalkers used to perform outside the hotel and across the street at Thurston Gardens surrounding the Fiji Museum. The next morning, I went to the museum.

I was not the first Italian scholar to visit the Fiji Museum; that was likely Vittorio Beonio Brocchieri, an Italian political science professor turned popular journalist. Brocchieri describes his hasty visit to the museum, which had only recently opened on the upper floor of the Carnegie Library on Victoria Parade, in his *Vita Selvaggia* ("savage life"), published in 1938. I discovered the book in the library of my maternal grandfather, a World War I Horse Artillery Colonel also named Guido. He probably found it quite amusing, particularly because he was in dissent with the racial laws being passed at that time by the fascist regime in Italy. What I found remarkable is that, right next to it, my grandfather kept another book by Brocchieri, *Camminare sul Fuoco* (walking on fire), which chronicles his journey in 1963 to observe the

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Anastenaria firewalking and religious healing in Langada, Greek Macedonia. In the book, Brocchieri only briefly mentions that firewalking has also been reported in Polynesia, citing Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl.

Beyond coincidences emerging from my family archives, as for my own visit to the Fiji Museum, I remember nobody could give me a straight answer about the firewalkers of Beqa, beyond just pointing at their island, and I found no clues at the museum either. Perhaps this is one of the reasons I returned to Fiji ten years later, joining a Pacific prehistory project launched in the summer of 1999 by the Fiji Museum under the direction of Terry Hunt, at that time teaching archaeology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. By the summer of 2002 my research goals were set, and I conducted a month of preliminary fieldwork in Beqa. My most prolific period was from October 2004 to July 2005, when I lived between the chiefly village of Dakuibeqa and Suva's Domain. I made shorter visits to Beqa in 2008, 2010, and 2013.

Mention firewalking to just about anyone and the response is likely to be skepticism or a remark about the paranormal. To be very honest, I experienced some skepticism myself when, in October 1992, I was invited to walk through a bed of gleaming white-hot stones along with a large number of Maohi and Māori people, and other nonnatives attending the Sixth Festival of Pacific Arts in Rarotonga, in the Cook Islands. I was there to prepare a documentary film for Italian television and to interview Raymond Teriirooterai Arioi Graffe, *grand prêtre des cérémonies traditionnelles tahitiennes*, said to be the only person left in French Polynesia able to conduct the firewalking ritual (Pigliasco and Francalanci 1992).

Even Margaret Mead, in a quite obscure "Appendix C" to her *Continuities in Cultural Evolution* (1964), seems to have fallen into the same skepticism when she writes (362–3):

> [I]t would be necessary to place this custom itself in a complex context… [A] custom which has two characteristic forms—the specific practice of walking on hot stones (the form taken by Fijian and Tahitian fire-walking) and walking on hot coals… A full discussion would include an attempt to measure "the genuineness" of the fire-walkers' immunity from burning.

Mead is on point about the correlation between Fijian and Tahitian firewalking customs. However, while the history of scientific investigation of the firewalk is largely a history of skepticism, it was never my intent to propose an explanation for fire-immunity or what has enabled firewalking to become such a widespread practice.

It's worth considering, though, that firewalking on either hot stones or coals has been around for a while; the earliest known reference to firewalking dates back to Iron Age India, around 1200 BC, and the oldest known record of a firewalk is of one that took place in India over four thousand years ago (Vaniprabha and Madhusudhan 2019:297). Firewalking is the most common of non-ordinary phenomena. As Pearce (1977:157) argued:

> Firewalking is such a common occurrence in so many countries simply because of the universal experience of fire itself. The idea is assimilated so easily because the points of similarity are so great that the few points of dissimilarity needing accommodation are not overwhelming. The act is impossible and incomprehensible to thinking as thinking, but not to thinking as action.

Considering that Firenze University Press is one of the major university publishers in Italy, let me get off my chest my position on Ernesto De Martino, a founding father of anthropology in Italy. Like Margaret Mead and several scholars who have commented on Fijian firewalking, De Martino never visited Beqa or even Fiji. In *Il Mondo Magico*, completed in August 1946 and published in 1948 (posthumously translated by Paul Saye White, and published with the title *The World of Magic* in the United States in 1972, and with the title *Primitive Magic* in the United Kingdom in 1988), De Martino investigates the links between parapsychology and anthropology. *Il Mondo Magico* was De Martino's work-revelation and is still a source of persisting bewilderment and fertile debate (Berardini 2013:11), in which he draws on his deep knowledge of folk Catholicism, superstitions, taboos, and magical rituals. He offers a gripping interpretation of the Fijian firewalking ceremony: "The natives of the Fiji Islands cook and eat the ripe '*masawe*' root [*Dracaena terminalis*]. The actual cooking of the root is a ceremony in itself, called the '*vilavilairevo*' which means 'he who enters the furnace'" (1986:29, 1988:10). "In the fire-walk of Mbenga [Beqa]," De Martino (1986:86–87, 1988:62) concludes:

> the nullification of the burning property of fire expresses a communication with "spirits," made possible through the particular privilege accorded the descendants of Na Galita [Tuiqalita]. The pit is consecrated in gratitude for the communication, as is the food. This food is also part of the ceremony and participates in the "*mana*" that is created.

Sadly, De Martino's brilliant insights on the *vilavilairevo* also appeared in the Italian journal *Historia Naturalis* under the magniloquent title "Il Signoreggiamento del Fuoco" (The Lordship of Fire, 1949), relying solely on the narratives of two medical doctors on New Zealand ships, Thomas Hocken (1898) and Robert Fulton (1903), and of two British colonial administrators in Fiji, Kingsley Roth (1902, 1933) and Basil Thompson (1894, 1895). More piteously, anthropologists in Italy have not continued De Martino's work on firewalking, with the exception of Bartoli's (1998) study on the practice of walking on burning embers by the *posadores* of San Pedro Manrique in the provinces of Soria, Castile and León, Spain.

The idea of magic challenges our basic concepts of reality and of the natural order of things. The typical reaction of disbelief to magical phenomena is actually not surprising. In confuting the idea that "magic is for eccentrics and fakes, or for unenlightened savages" (1988:i), De Martino points out the error of

this line of thought. Commenting on Hegel's *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1817), De Martino observes, "For Hegel magic is still something within the area of 'superstitions' and 'abnormalities of weak minds'." Hegel doesn't realize, according to De Martino, that if humanity had not achieved the liberation that is made possible through magic we would not now be striving so vigorously for a final and complete liberation of the mind (1986:258, 1988:201). What is "real" for us is not necessarily real for other people: "Whether magic powers, even to some extent, are real or not, is a question that depends upon *what is meant by 'real'*" (De Martino 1986:87, 1988:63).

Similarly, De Martino expressed to Neapolitan philosopher Benedetto Croce his doubts about the theoretical hold of a philosophy of the mind that refused to thematize magical phenomena as a genuine historical problem, presenting Croce with an ethnological interest to which he was not at all sensitive (Croce 1949:193–208). In a letter to Croce, De Martino writes:

> Magic is the "history as thought and action" of the primitives; if nature is, as you say, history without history as by us written, then magic is a story of nature represented and acted upon, if not really by the plants and animals of which nature is made up, then by men very close to plants and animals, and therefore able to do more to remake nature than we are. (De Martino 2007:63; see also Berardini 2013:63)

Borrowing from De Martino, for those who practice it, magic is a system of compensations, guarantees, and protections, as well as a vital form of self-preservation, and by extension, I would add, of social capital. When I asked Ro Mereani Tuimatanisiga, a member of the Sawau chiefly family in Beqa, to comment on my choice not to essay any explanation on the human body's fire-immunity, but to focus instead on her tribe's social body's epistemologies related to their cultural heritage, she very eloquently replied:

> If we were to delve into the physiological aspects of the *vilavilairevo*, I feel it would take away from the tribe the magic *mana* that every member of the tribe (including myself) feels the *vilavilairevo* gives each one of us, i.e., our faith and belief in our protection from what we call "the children" or *ko ira na gone* or *veli*. One can argue the way it is being publicised today in the hotels is resulting in a slow erosion of the *mana* or magic. I feel that this process will ultimately expose *vilavilairevo* as a psychological process in the "mind over matter" category. My own concern is for the well-being of the Sawau tribe, and I feel that to seek out physiological reasons why they are not burned would certainly bring confusion into the whole ceremony. Such confusion may well result in people being burned. As there are at present no proven theories of the physiological reason for our tribe's ability to walk on fire, there is room for an array of different hypothetical interpretations, any of which would negatively affect the tribe's association of the *vilavilairevo* with a sense of "magic." As outside observers we should be very cautious indeed of undermining a belief

> system, a weltanschauung, of a tribe. It is perhaps true that external observers as well as some members of the tribe, including myself, who have a broader view can entertain a range of alternate hypotheses, but such speculation is deleterious in its effect. (Ro Mereani Tuimatanisiga pers. comm. 24 May 2007)

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Ro Mereani and her son Felix, who provided ideas, support, and invaluable ethnographic data. The privilege of staying in the village of Dakuibeqa was accorded to me by her brother, the chief of the Sawau people (Tui Sawau), Ratu Timoci Matanitobua, who not only approved my research but also acted as a liaison with government officials in Suva. The Sawau people of Beqa were very generous to me. I am equally indebted to the Naivilaqata *bete* (priestly) clan members of the Sawau *yavusa* (tribe), who actively participated in the process of remapping their culture and knowledge. There are no words to thank the late *bete* Samu Vakuruivalu and his family. His hospitality made my stay in Dakuibeqa always an unforgettably pleasant experience, and his guidance through the back regions and back stages of the tourist industry was priceless: taking me on long hikes in the upper Namoliwai River rainforest of Beqa, along routes that only his father and a few other Sawau elders knew, to map the acclaimed "source" of the *vilavilairevo*; allowing me to be at his side in the hotels' and resorts' staff cafeterias and locker rooms before the shows, and, after the shows and several cups of kava, to crash with him and the other Sawau firewalkers on the floor of Navua harbor's mosquito-infested community hall until our early morning passage back to Beqa.

Deep inside I have always known that I would not follow in my father's footsteps as a lawyer; while I was preparing for the bar exam in 1991 I wrote a letter to Professor Jean Guiart, author of *Océanie* (1963) and head of the Laboratoire d'ethnologie du Musée de l'Homme in Paris, for advice. I had asked my mother to mail it from Paris to be sure he would receive it. Guiart replied right away, suggesting I apply to the Université Paris-Dauphine. I did not, and it took me nine more years to find my mentor while practicing law for a living. I could not imagine a better, more supportive, or more encouraging mentor than Andrew Arno, who had studied with Klaus Friedrich Koch at Harvard and who generously made me part of the legal anthropology lineage initiated by Koch and Laura Nader at Berkeley. It is impossible to count all the ways Andrew helped me in my career. I am much obliged to him and honored to dedicate this book to him, in particular the last chapter, which is my last essay benefiting from his impeccable supervision.

Working with Andrew, it became clear to me that my interest in the view from below and in the "less visible faces of law"—as in the case of the intangible cultural properties of the Sawau people—necessitated an unconventional ethnographic approach to disentangle the intertwined topics of property, heritage, commodification, tradition, and change on Beqa. In every tradition of theistic belief there are records of questioning doubt and

disbelief; although Andrew sadly could not complete the architecture of his last project on "doubt" and its congeries of related terms, an elegant spinoff of his last book (2009), "doubt," "belief," and "disbelief" inform several aspects of my research in Beqa.

In a recent article kindly shared with me by Karen Brison, she observes that in Fiji, "Pentecostal Christianity can lead to moral tensions by advocating the impossible goal of freeing the interior self from social entanglements" (2017:657). I admit that, a few times while visiting the village of Rukua on the west coast of Beqa, after those endless Pentecostal services with high-spirited singing and enticing instrumental music, I was tempted to open up with Rukuan long-time collaborator and historian Mika Tubanavau and other Sawau close friends. Reflecting on dogmas and hierarchies, my own view is what Pietro Pomponazzi, an Aristotelian and philosopher of doubt himself, was teaching in Padua in the early sixteenth century: that demons and angels are not real, and that people do not need the threat of heaven and hell in order to be moral.

I am furthermore grateful to my colleague Matt Tomlinson for accepting my request to synthesize my work in Beqa in this book's afterword, providing the reader with a sense of closure in a way my essays cannot do. Tomlinson's path-breaking investigations on Christian politics in Fiji, along with his fieldwork on the neighboring island of Kadavu, paved the way for my interviews with church officials, ministers, and practitioners in Beqa and in Suva. The provocative question with which we started a workshop organized by Tomlinson and Debra McDougall at Monash University in July 2010—"What difference, after all, *does* Christianity make?"—allowed me to see the Sawau tribe's experiences of Christianity in all their complexity and singularity. It revealed to me the increasingly complex issues of denominational competition among church groups for adherents in Beqa and how the processes of circulation involving powerful sermons and dogmatic fears influence and undermine the *vilavilairevo* ceremony itself.

National Geographic Foreign Editorial Staff Luis Marden, under the veneer of the exotic and conservative humanism typical of the popular magazine, shocked the world in the October 1958 issue by revealing that, "'Talking with a small devil', the brawny fire walkers remain secluded all night in a hut. Then, at a signal, they come out and walk across the pit of red-hot stones." Despite his inaccuracies about the ritual preparation, Marden is clearly referring to the *veli*, the charming tutelary guardians of the Sawau *dauvila* (firewalkers) central to the *vilavilairevo* ceremony. As Matt Tomlinson recently commented, the *veli*, "like other Oceanic little people—and especially like the *kakamora* of Makira—embody places and their pasts in new, hopeful projects of imagination that look for signs of indigenous strength" (2016:17). It is true. After Diane Purkiss's illuminating work on fairies "menacing history," I realized that, *mutatis mutandis*, the *italanoa* (stories) about the *veli*—

offhandedly flagged as demons by the Fijian churches—show exceedingly strict rules of behavior, not for the fairies or the *veli* but for the human beings, and that these rules exist for reasons of self-preservation, not morality (Purkiss 2000:8).

Finally, I express my *vakavinavinaka*, my deepest gratitude, to the Director of the Fiji Museum, Sipiriano Nemani, for his generous foreword. Nemani and I met in Suva in 2004 when he was just about to launch the daunting *Na ituvatuva ni kilaka itaukei kei na kena matanataki* (National Inventory on Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture), the ongoing Cultural Mapping Program taking place throughout Fiji's fourteen provinces and coordinated by the iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture. Nemani was instrumental in formulating research strategies and a methodology for the mapping initiative and development of a toolkit designed to provide guidance in collecting, archiving, and interpreting intangible cultural heritage in Pacific Island countries and communities. Nemani realized early on how difficult it is to distinguish, as in the case of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony, between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The Sawau people of Beqa see the different types of heritage as forming a symbiotic relationship. Nemani was therefore instrumental in the development of *The Sawau Project* (Pigliasco and Colatanavanua 2005), welcoming the idea of making it a useful multimedia educational tool to encourage indigenous communities to build research capacity, methodologies, linkages, and institutional collaborations. With his expertise in community resilience and capacity-building workshops in the Pacific Island region, Nemani was perhaps the first in Fiji to foster the idea that raising awareness can enhance "in situ" preservation, the preservation of Pacific Islanders' cultural expressions as a living, evolving body of knowledge and not merely something to be displayed in a museum.

The essays collected in this book were written over the past ten years, after I received my doctorate from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Chronicling the culture of the Sawau people of Beqa over more than a decade gave me a chance to face my own failures in grasping their worldview, and at the same time I learned how to enter more deeply into that worldview. My research did not start out as a long-term project but it has certainly turned out that way. As Clifford Geertz (1988) observed long ago, we may fall under certain illusions after our first piece of fieldwork: that we are now able to grasp the native's point of view, or that ethnography is a matter of sorting strange and irregular facts into familiar and orderly categories, when actually it is our hosts who with remarkable patience instruct us in all the domains of their lives. For this reason, anthropologists should go back to the field not only to check on various hypotheses but also out of concern for the people who have been so generous to them and to find out what is happening with their lives as the changing dynamics of technology flows accelerate the rapid turnover of ideas and beliefs.

The immaterial cultural heritage of the Sawau people with its challenges and paradoxes is the dominant theme running through the six essays which form the chapters of this book. Traditionally performed only by members of the Sawau tribe on the island of Beqa, the *vilavilairevo* is a prime example of a propitiation ritual that has become commodified to suit the requirements of tourism. Shaped by the tourists' predilection for highly visual cultural performances, *vilavilairevo* has become the signature "brand" statement of Fijian culture. From the essays collected in the book emerges a picture of how issues of property, heritage, and international policies intertwine with local realities and practices. On Beqa, cultural, religious, social, and economic relations have become more global over time through the integration of markets and the rapid spread of technologies such as social media, which are redefining concepts of identity, self-determination, public domain, and the legitimacy of international institutions, reflecting a hierarchy of power at the international level. The essays collected in this book ultimately address some fundamental issues in anthropology related to the social role of ritual and the political economy of ritual, including the legal status of ritual as a form of property poised between being a central element of cultural heritage and having a commercial role in the transnational tourist industry.

Thanks to the Firenze University Press editor and anonymous reviewers for helpful criticism and suggestions. I also express my deep gratitude to Laurie Durand and David Strauch, the hardworking editor duo who turned my essays into a readable book. Along with the publisher, I would like also to thank the following copyright holders for permission to reproduce papers. Chapter 1, *Domodomo* (journal of the Fiji Museum); chapter 2, *People and Culture in Oceania* (journal of the Japanese Society for Oceanic Studies); chapter 3, *Pacific Studies*; chapter 4, *Oceania*; and chapter 5, *International Journal of Cultural Property.*

Figure 3. *25 April 1950*
Naivilaqata clan's *bete levu* (high priest) Marika Tivitivi leads firewalkers from the chiefly village of Dakuibeqa into the pit in Nasinu, Suva, as part of the events opening the South Pacific Conference. The photo was possibly taken by Australian travel writer Colin Simpson, who published a similar one in his *Islands of Men* (1955). Courtesy of the son of Marika Tivitivi, Samuela Vakuruivalu.

CHAPTER 1

NA VILAVILAIREVO: THE FIJIAN FIREWALKING CEREMONY

> And as for the story of the Fijians walking unscorched over redhot stones, and the parallels to which Mr. Lang refers, I presume that he agrees with me that the whole thing is a trick. I don't pretend to know how it is done. But it is well known that the soles of people who go bare-footed acquire a callosity which enables them to endure what we could hardly tolerate in our boots. Moreover, barbaric conjurors are, to use slang, "up to snuff" as well as Professor Pepper or Mr. Maskelyne. Sir Benjamin Ward Richardson tells me that the feet may be rendered insensible to heat by bathing them in very diluted sulphuric acid. The Fijian fire-walkers are probably ignorant of that recipe. But they may know of something equally protective.
>
> — Edward Clodd, President of the Folklore Society (1865)

Introduction

Vilavilairevo, literally "jumping into the earth oven," belongs to that set of topics haphazardly pillaged and investigated by scientists, psychologists, theologians, missionaries, travel writers, and anthropologists. This traditional cultural expression, owned by the Naivilaqata clan of the Sawau tribe of Beqa, has been often misconceived and misrepresented, with the result of a degradation and destitution of their beliefs and actions. Spectacular indigenous rituals involving "savage" acts of bravery elicit the fantasies and voyeuristic gaze of tourist and media audiences. Shaped by the audiences' predilection for highly visual cultural performances, the firewalking ceremony has become a signature brand statement of Fijian culture.[1] In examining how the media

[1] Seven groups from the Sawau *yavusa* (tribe) are currently performing *vilavilairevo* on a regular basis, approved by the Tui Sawau and the Naivilaqata *bete* elders in Dakuibeqa, for a total of more than one hundred male individuals between 15 and 65 years old entitled to perform it. There are five groups on Beqa: three from Dakuibeqa, one from Naceva, and one from Soliyaga; outside Beqa, there are two groups: one from the neighbor island of Yanuca and one from Lepanoni on Viti Levu.

Guido Carlo Pigliasco, *Custodians of the Gift*. ©2020 Firenze University Press. This chapter previously published in *Domodomo* (Special Issue) 23(1–2):1–86, Fiji Museum: Suva, Fiji, 2009.

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and tourist industries have influenced the reproduction and reinvention of firewalking in contemporary Fijian society, my research has addressed some fundamental issues in anthropology related to the social role of ritual, cultural change, and the accommodations and transformative interactions between traditional and modern economic and legal systems focusing on the legal status of ritual as a form of immaterial property poised between being a central element of cultural heritage and having a commercial role in the transnational tourist industry.[2]

In this chapter, I present a merely historical-hermeneutical reconstruction of the firewalking ceremony in Fiji and Oceania based on the archival material I collected (Pigliasco 2007a).[3] Over the last forty years, ritual transformation in *vilavilairevo* has been well-documented. However, in examining both ownership of and change in ritual, it is necessary to establish the early historical meanings of the ceremony as clearly as possible. Early historical accounts offer new insights on the origins of Fijian firewalking and its relation to other Oceanic firewalking ceremonies such as the Tahitian-Raiatean *umu tī* ceremony.

Early popular and scholarly accounts include a wide range of ethnographies and reports from various people who witnessed or analyzed the firewalking ceremony and the use of *Cordyline* plant earth ovens in Fiji and Oceania.[4] They examine the ceremony from different angles, including discussions on folklore, religion, psychology, and history. Most of the early scholars did not observe the ceremony themselves, but based their analyses on information supplied by others (e.g., De Martino 1948, 1949; Eliade 1951; Frazer 1913; Mannhardt 1875–1877; Mead 1964). Nevertheless, Frazer's and Eliade's encyclopedic works, written during the early stages of modern studies of

[2] Pigliasco, Guido Carlo (2007) *The Custodians of the Gift: Intangible Cultural Property and Commodification of the Fijian Firewalking Ceremony*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

[3] Between 1992 and 2009, I collected more than two hundred and fifty references on Beqa and Sawau history and the firewalking ceremony in Beqa and Oceania. I organized these references into ten categories: missionary accounts, colonial accounts, antiquities and early scholarship, cognitive and physiological analyses, local news, travel and tourist literature, visual recordings, archaeology and ethnobotany, anthropology of tourism, and general cultural anthropology.

[4] The Latin name *Cordyline* come from the Greek *kordyle* 'club', referring to the plant's large and fleshy roots. The most wide-ranging species of the genus is *Cordyline fruticosa* (C. *terminalis*), probably native to east Asia (Fankhauser 1987:4). According to Fankhauser, *Cordyline* is often confused with species of *Dracaena*, another member of the Agavaceae (Asparagales) family. They can be distinguished by *Cordyline*'s creeping rootstock with three large bracts at its base. The *Cordyline* plant is known as *tī* in Huahine-Ra'iātea and *masawe* in Beqa.

mythology and comparative religion, remain thought-provoking.[5] Andrew Lang's (1895, 1900, 1901a, 1901b, 1903) hermeneutical remarks about "first fruits" in Oceania have sustained ethno-philological interest.[6] In a letter to Samuel P. Langley, third Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution from 1887 to 1906, Lang writes:

> I am glad that *Folk-Lore* is turning its attention to the Fire Walk. Its interest is religious, apart from the problem of the immunity from blisters. In the Oceanic area, the rite appears to be one of the sanctifying of First Fruits. In the Asiatic area the rite, at least some cases, is one of purification. Mr. Frazer suggests that, in ancient Italy, "the passage of the priests of Soranus through the fire was a magical ceremony designed to procure a due supply of light and warmth for the earth by mimicking the sun's passage across the firmament," that is, if Soranus (Apollo) was a sun-god (*Golden Bough*, 1890, iii:312).[7] I have not observed this magical purpose asserted where the rite is still practiced. Mannhardt [1875–1877, II:318–37] thinks that perhaps the Italian firewalkers (*Hirpi*—wolves) represented the Corn spirit—not the Sun. This is not the case where the firewalkers have no corn, but perhaps they then represent the *masawe spirit?* (Lang 1901:453)

Young (1925), Handy (1927, 1930), Henry (1893, 1901, 1928), and Fulton (1903) are some of the few scholars offering precious firsthand accounts of the *umu tī* ceremony in Huahine and Ra'iātea, helping ascertain the ceremony's inherent first-fruit, apotropaic nature. Hocken's (1898) vivid account of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony in Beqa emphasizes the importance of the starchy-sweet *masawe* root in the village economy and the role of the Naivilaqata priestly clan in its ceremonial cooking.[8] He also introduces one of its members, Jonacani Dabea, who Basil Thomson (1894) and Lindt (1893) met in September 1892, and whose name appears in *Na Mata* (30 Nov. 1885:2) and in the *Cyclopedia of Fiji* (1907). Remarkably, Jonacani Dabea, described as a Native Stipendiary

[5] Scottish social anthropologist Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, first published in 1890, took a modernist, atheoretical approach to religion as a cultural phenomenon.

[6] Andrew Lang, an honorary fellow of Merton College, was chiefly known for his publications on folklore, mythology, and religion and contributions to anthropology.

[7] Elsewhere (Pigliasco 2007:57), I commented that in classical times, on Mount Soracte in the ancient Falerii Veteres region (today's cities of Fiano Romano, Capena, and Civita Castellana), the Hirpi-Sorani tribe, cult followers of Apollo Sorano (the cult of Soranus was subsumed by Apollo), walked over hot coals not as part of a competition, but to propitiate the rural fertility goddess Feronia, revering her in order to secure a good harvest (see Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* vii. 19; Virgil, *Aen.* xi. 784 *sqq.* with the comment of Servius; Strabo, v. 2. 9, 226; Dionysius Halicarnasensis, *Antiquit. Rom.* iii. 32, in Frazer 1913:17, n.26; see also Lang 1901:288–9; Mannhardt, 1875–1877:327 *sqq.*; Ross-Taylor 1923:83–84). In Roman mythology, both Apollo and Feronia were divinities associated with light, sun, crops, and prosperity, receiving first fruits and propitiatory gifts.

[8] Hocken was a physician on board the *Dunedin* out of New Zealand.

Magistrate from Rewa (*Turaga-ni-Lewa i Taukei mai Rewa*), became one of the first middle-men and impresarios of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony in Fiji.

The earliest commentators on the cross-cultural phenomenon of firewalking speculated about the body-mind relationship of people undergoing the ordeal. Some early scholars found the "paranormal" aspect of firewalking especially alluring, while others attempted "scientific" observations. The history of scientific investigation of the firewalk is largely a history of skepticism, however. Some recorded the temperature of the bed of burning coals or hot rocks (Haggard 1902), determined how long the feet of the firewalkers were in contact with the fire, or measured the flow of blood to their feet and the thickness of their calluses. Samples of skin from the soles of firewalkers were also taken from the Anastenarides of Langadas (Danforth 1989:208). In Beqa, Fulton (1903:191) took samples of the stones used by firewalkers.[9] Some early observers tried walking on fire themselves.[10] A few burned their trousers (Langley 1901). In Beqa, in 1892, Lady Thurston casually dropped her handkerchief in the fire to see if it would burn (Jackson 1899:73; Lindt 1893:52; Thomson 1894:204).

Firewalking in Oceania

From an ethno-archaeological perspective, *umu tī* (earth ovens)[11] used to bake the starchy roots of the *Cordyline* plant are reported in various parts of Polynesia. Their origin in Polynesia is most likely in the Fiji-Sāmoa-Tonga region, in accordance with a phylogenetic model of Polynesian cultural traits originating in West Polynesia and subsequently expanding into East Polynesia (Carson 2002:359; Kirch and Green 1987; Kirch 2001; Marck 1999). Fankhauser points out that the Māori constructed earth ovens and baked the *Cordyline* in the same manner as in the rest of Polynesia, evidently bringing the technology with them (Fankhauser 1986:21). Considering these circumstances, Carson believes that "a date range of c. 1250 to 1450 seems most appropriate as the earliest corroborated time period of *umu tī* in Sāmoa

[9] Robert Fulton was a physician on another New Zealand ship. He had one of the stones from the *lovo* carried for miles in a palm-leaf basket back to the ship. He tried to cool it off in the sea, but the stone, still hot, fell out of the basket and he had to drop it overboard, conserving only a fragment, later analyzed by a professor at the Otago School of Mines (Simpson 1955:238).

[10] Notably, Walter Edgar Gudgeon, British Resident of the Cook Islands, in Rarotonga, and George Ely Hall, a Turkish Consul-General, along with a Commodore Germinot, in Taha'a (Gudgeon 1899:58–60; Henry 1901:54; Lang 1901:454).

[11] Proto Oceanic *qumun*, Proto Polynesian *qumu* (Kirch and Green 2001:150).

and New Zealand, without excluding the small possibility of an earlier date" (Carson 2002:359).[12]

Archeological evidence shows that specialized *tī* oven technology became a primary characteristic of most Polynesian societies, closely correlated to an absence of heating-resistant ceramic vessels (Carson 2002:360, Leach 1982, LeMoine 1987). Fankhauser (1986) observes that the *tī* plant (*Cordyline terminalis* or *fruticosa*) introduced in Oceania by its early inhabitants, is undoubtedly of a very ancient origin, and while its major use was for food, it also had medicinal and protective magico-religious uses throughout the Pacific islands. The pan-Polynesian distribution of the *Cordyline* earth ovens suggests that the *umu tī* was a cultural trait of Polynesian societies (Carson 2002:363).

As for the ritual associated with it, the *umu tī* ceremony of firewalking, besides Beqa's practice, discussed in the next section, several "eye-witness" accounts show the presence of the rite of walking on the earth oven's hot stones in several Pacific islands:

> Ra'iātea-Huahine-Taha'a, and successively in Tahiti (*inter alia* Handy 1927; Hastwell 1899[1885]; Henry 1893, 1928; Huguenin 1902; Langley 1901; Oliver 1974; Sasportas 1926, 1930; Young 1925); by Tahitians in the Cook Islands (Gudgeon 1899; Large 1911); and by Tahitians in O'ahu, Hawai'i (Davey 1901; Gorten 1891; *Hawaiian Gazette* 1900; *Hawaiian Gazette* 1901; *Journal of American Folklore* 1901; Kenn 1949);
>
> Aotearoa (Best 1902, 1924; Hammond 1924);
>
> Santo and Pentecost islands, Vanuatu (Regenvanu pers. comm.);
>
> Biak, West Papua (Rumiakek pers. comm.).

In addition, indirect accounts report firewalking (practiced by Hawaiians) in Hawai'i (Kenn 1949; Long 1954[1948]; Pukui et al. 1972).

Carson (2002) observes that this distribution shows that the *umu tī* are more frequently reported in areas where the appropriate volcanic heating stones can be found in abundance, but are not or are only rarely reported in places where these materials are lacking or scarce. All ethnographic cases of *umu tī* indicate their large size, intense heat, and prolonged heating time. These conditions may explain the apparently very rare occurrence of *tī* oven technology and the complete absence of firewalking practices in Tonga, or in Sāmoa, where ritual ceremonies have been lost, indicating that cultural elaboration is unlikely to have occurred in frequent activities but rather only on rare occasions (Buck 1930:136; Carson 2002:364; see also Clark 1996; Yunker 1959).

[12] The earliest possible date range reported for actual use of an earth oven in Polynesia is the period ca. 900 to 1250 in New Zealand (Fankhauser 1986:81–82, cited in Carson 2002:359).

According to traditional priest (*tahua*) Tu-nui Arii-peu, who in January 1949 accepted Charles Kenn's invitation to come to Honolulu to perform a firewalking ceremony (*umu tī*) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa,

> The rite of fire-walking did not form a part of the older Polynesian culture. It was introduced about a hundred years ago from Fiji, and spread to many of the South Sea Islands. It appeared in Huahine, the chief's island [Arii-peu], around 1850, and about the same time began to be reported from Taha's [Taha'a] and Ra'iātea, the Cook Islands, Fiji and New Zealand. (Kenn 1949:25)[13]

A confirmation of the origin of the *umu tī* ceremony in Huahine in the Society Islands is offered by Young, who became interested in the *umu tī* in the late 1800s, and attended the ceremony three times. Replying to Teuira Henry's account in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* (1893:104–7), he observes that "the ceremony of the *umu tī* (the oven or fire pit of the *tī* plant (*Dracæna terminalis*) is said to have been first practiced in the Eastern Pacific on the island of Huahine at the *marae* of Fare-ti which was dedicated to the demi-god Hiro, a voyager of ancient times" (Young 1925:219).

Young makes a series of interesting comments about the ceremony before it "degenerated into an exhibition to tourists, and the ritual is garbled even to the extent of recital of verses from the Scriptures!" (1925:219). Young accurately reports that in the "ancient ritual" the fire-pit was

> Generally circular from three to four fathoms (18ft. to 24ft.) in diameter and four to six feet in depth. The area of the heated stones would be from 14ft. to 16ft. in diameter. (Young 1925:219)

Curiously, this shape, size, and depth of earth oven does not correspond to images recorded in the early 1900s of the ovens used for the *umu tī* ceremony, which were rectilinear, quadrilateral, or rectangular (Davey 1901; see also Kenn 1949; Leimbach and Graffe 1988; Pigliasco and Francalanci 1992), but does describe well those used for the *vilavilairevo* in Fiji.

The circular pit described by Young, possibly referring to the *umu tī* ceremony he saw on Ra'iātea on 20 July 1898, is confirmed by a relative of Paul Huguenin, artist Fritz Huguenin-Lassauguette, who sketched it by hand on the same day (Huguenin 1902:145)[14]; by Hastwell, who saw it in Ra'iātea

[13] Charles Kenn, first recipient of the Living Treasures of Hawai'i honor, was a scholar of Hawaiiana, which he taught at the University of Hawai'i, at University of California at Los Angeles, and at Brigham Young University in Lā'ie. He was "gratefully and in all humility" adopted by Chief Tu-nui Arii-peu as his blood son giving Kenn an honored place in his family line and a new name, "Arii-peu Tamaiti" (Kenn 1949:35–36).

[14] Paul Huguenin, a Swiss teacher, arrived in Tahiti in 1896 with his wife Élisabeth in the position of Director of the Écoles des Îles Sous-le-Vent. Having mastered the Tahitian language and customs he was adopted by the Taumihau family of Ra'iātea and started studying legends, beliefs, and chants. In October 1899 his bad health forced him to leave Ra'iātea and return to Europe. Arguably, Fritz-Edouard Huguenin-Virchaux (1842–1926)

on 20 September 1885; and by Henry's brother-in-law's testimony and sketch by hand in 1890[15] (Henry 1893:104–5[16]; see also Henry 1928:214–5).

While Handy flimsily classifies the ceremony as a purificatory rite intended to destroy evil influences (Handy 1927, 1930), Henry emphasizes the essential role of the *tī* root, which "is frequently two feet long, and varies from six to ten inches in diameter. It has something of the texture of the sugar-cane and its thick juice is very sweet and nourishing, but it requires to be well baked before eating" (Henry 1893:105). Young explains that "the object of the ceremony, as stated by one of the priests of the cult some 40 years ago, was to ensure that crops of food and fruit should be good (and to that end that plentiful rains should fall), also that the different species of migratory fishes should not fail to make their appearance at their usual seasons" (1925:222). Kenn notes that

> Whatever foreign names may have been given to the ritual, it became known in short order as the "Ceremony of the *Tī* Root Oven" (*Te umu tī*). The roots of the *tī*-plant were baked in ground ovens when other food was scarce. Because the cooking took too much time, many heated rocks had to be made ready to place in the pits… The rite had been used to provide or to give proof of "purity" or "purification" in the religious sense. It was supposed to bring clairvoyance and clairaudience so that the fate of lost voyagers might be learned, lost articles recovered etc. It was a thanksgiving ceremony. It called down a blessing on crops and people and animals. It brought rain. It replenished the fish in waters nearby. (Kenn 1949:26, 32).

According to Kenn, in Polynesia the *umu tī* was an additional rite not intended to replace older rites already in use:

> Once a set of ideas has been accepted [in Polynesia], it is fitted neatly in with other ideas already a part of the scheme of things, and soon takes on the aspect of having been part of the older system for centuries back. In this process of adopting the new beliefs and practices, slight changes are made. Words are changed, invocations made over into the more familiar tongue, and the names of the foreign gods replaced by the Polynesian counterparts. (Kenn 1949:27)

This confirms Oliver's assertion that although these ceremonies seem to have been "specifically Tahitian (or actually Raiatean) in cosmographic reference, this does not necessarily prove that the custom prevailed in the Society Islands in pre-European times. Firewalking is attested in other Polynesian archipelagos and might well have been introduced (or reintroduced) into the

married Jeanne Joséphine Lassauguette, a French woman from Orthez, and adopted the professional name of Fritz Huguenin-Lassauguette.

[15] Teuira Henry's brother-in-law Gustaf Brodien of Ra'iātea.

[16] The sketch was made by Mr. Barnfield of Honolulu based on the picture taken in 1890 in Uturoa, Ra'iātea, by Monsieur Morné, Lieutenant de Vaisseau (Henry 1893:106).

Society Islands from elsewhere during the nineteenth century" (1974:94). Moreover, while the language used in the invocations by Tupua in 1890 and 1898 (Henry 1893:106–7; Young 1925:216–7) is consistent with that used by Arii-peu in 1949 (Kenn 1949:38–42), Young observes that none of the invocations to the gods he recorded at the *umu tī* ceremonies were used anywhere else in the Eastern Pacific.

Tu-nui Arii-peu told Kenn that in Huahine-Ra'iātea "firewalking was handed down to the eldest son, or lacking a son, to one consecrated as a blood son (*hoolaa*) for that purpose" (Kenn 1949:28). Arii-peu was a descendant of the original firewalker in Huahine, Mae-haa, who passed it to his son Maoa, and who in turn consecrated his son, Papa-ita, from whom he passed it to Afaitaata, and then to Arii-peu. In his reconstruction Kenn observes that another *grand prêtre* (*tahua*), Arii-pao, also practiced firewalking in Ra'iātea. Supposedly, Tupua and Taero, two other *tahua* from Ra'iātea, came from the "Raiatean" lineage, for Young reports that they were the last *tahua* of the *umu tī* (Young 1925).

There is a historical gap between the *umu tī* practice of the 1950s, which was granted by descendence rights, and the disfranchised *umu tī* revival of the 1970s. This has made it impossible to learn more about Arii-peu and his predecessors. Raymond Teriirooterai Arioi Graffe, a *tahua* who performed the *umu tī* ceremony at the Festival of Pacific Arts in Northern Queensland in 1988 and in Rarotonga in 1992, helped bring about a revival of *umu tī* in his quest for cultural identity that started in the 1970s in Tahiti.[17]

Since the 1980s, the *umu tī* ceremony is occasionaly performed in Tahiti exclusively by Graffe and his family. However, Ben Finney's reminiscence of the firewalking ceremony held on the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa grounds at the time when Emory was directing the Bishop Museum (i.e., the ceremony of 1949 described by Kenn) helped me establish an invaluable ethnographic link with Teretia Terooatea, a descendent of Raiatean firewalkers.

[17] I met Graffe in Rarotonga in October 1992 and in Hitiaa (Tahiti) in August 2002. Born in Punaauia (Tahiti) in 1948, he worked as a primary school teacher in Papeete for seven years, then traveled to France to study archaeology at the Institute of Art and Archaeology of the University of Paris. In the 1980s, he became interested in the *umu tī* ceremony and traditional tattooing, and mastered knowledge of the Tahitian pantheon of gods and goddesses and design patterns. He gradually put his ancestral tattoos on his own body. Others who followed a similar quest for cultural identity include Coco Hotahota in the dancing arts, John Mairai in theatrical arts, Henri Hiro reconstructing traditional ceremonies on the *marae*, Clément Pito in the art of traditional navigation, Duro Raapoto and others (Graffe, quoted by Gotz 2001:21).

Table 1.1 Steps and invocations used in the *umu tī* ceremony

Steps and invocations used in the *umu tī* ceremony by *tahua* (traditional priest) Tupua in 1890, 1898 (Henry 1893; Young 1925; Taumihau[1] in O'Brien 1921)	**Steps and invocations used in the *umu tī* ceremony by *tahua* (traditional priest) Tu-nui Arii-peu in 1949** (Kenn 1949)	**Translation of *tahua* Tupua**
E tapea na te rima i te rau ti, a parau ai:	[According to Kenn this is the 2nd invocation, before breaking the *tī* plant]	Hold the *tī* leaves in the hand and say:
"E te Nu'u atua e! A ara, a tia i nia! Te haere nei taua i te umu-tī ananahi."	*E te Nu'u-atua! A ra, a tia i nia Te haere nei taua i te umu tī ananahi!*	"O ye conclave of the gods! Awake! Arise! Let us go to the *ti*-oven tomorrow!"
Mareva na, e atua īa; e mau na te avae i raro; e taata ïa. A hio tia ra i te vai-ra'a o te umu ra, e a ofati i te rau ti, mai te na ô e:		If they float in the air, they are gods, but if their feet touch the ground they are human beings. Now, look towards the direction of the oven and break off the *tī* leaves and say:
"E te Nu'u atua e! E haere oe i teie nei po, e ananahi ra, o tatou atoa i'a."	*E te Nu'u-atua e! E Te haere oe i teie nei po! E ananahi tatou atea ia!*	"Oh assembly of the gods! You shall go [to the *ti*-oven] tonight, and tomorrow we shall go together."
A rūrū ra i tea au ti ei tautoo tahutahu,[2] amoemoe i roto i te marae, mai te ota'ata'a i roto i te rau fau, e ia vai i reira hoe ae rui a na ô ai te poroi atu:	[According to Kenn, this is the 3rd invocation, while placing *tī* plant in *marae*, before leaving the *tī* plant area]	Then, wrap the the *tī* leaves up in leaves of hibiscus and put them to sleep in the *marae* where they must remain until morning, and while leaving say:
"'A'e! A ara, e te nu'u atua e! To avae te haere i te umu tī. Te pape e te miti te haere atoa. Te to'e uri ma te to'e tea e haere i te umu.	*Ae! E ara, e te Nu'u atua e! To avae te haere i te umu-tī. Te pape e te miti, e haere atea. Te to'e, ma te to'e tea, e haere i te Umu.*	"Arise! Awake assembly of gods! Let your feet take you to the *ti*-oven. The waters of the rivers and the waters of the ocean shall go together; the darkness and the light shall go to the fire pit;[3]

[1] A Deacon of Ra'iātea (O'Brien 1921: 515).

[2] Henry (1893:107) observes that this is old Tahitian and many words are obsolete "*Tahutahu*, means sorcery and also to kindle a fire".

[3] Henry (1893:107) translates: "Let the dark earth-worm, and the light earth-worm, go to the oven". Young argues that "it is true that *to'e* is an earth-worm, but in this case it appears from careful research that *toe'e uri* means darkness or a darkening, and *to'e e tea* light or the beginning of light—the expression *to'e uri ma te to'e tea* has been variously translated by old natives to mean: 'Night and day;' 'Twilight and dawn;' 'The waning and the waxing

"Te ura o te auahi, e te ruirui o te auahi, e haere anae; na oe e haere, e haere oe i teie nei po, e ananahi ra o oe ia e o vau, e haere taua i te umu tī."	*Te ura o te auahi, e haere ana'e; na oe e haere, e haere oe i teia nei po, e ananahi ra o oe ia e o vau; e haere taua i te umu-tī.*	let the redness and the shades of the fire all go. You shall go, tonight you shall go and tomorrow you and I shall go the *ti*-oven."
Ia a'ahiata ra a ti'i a rave mai i te rau ti. A amo ai i te umu roa; a tatara i te ineinera'a o te feia a haere i nia i taua umu ra a fa'atia ai i mua a na ō ai	[According to Kenn this is the 4th invocation, before fire-walking] [4]	Then, the at early dawn take and bring there the *tī* leaves tied up into a wand carrying them on the shoulder straight to the oven, unwrap them when everybody is ready to pass through the fire pit, hold them forward and say:
"'E na ta'ata e tahutahu i te umu e! A tapohe na! E to'e uri! E to'e tea! Te pape! Te miti! Te a'ama o te umu! Te ru'i ru'i o te umu! A hi'i atu i te tapua avae o te feia e haere nei, a tahiri na i te ahu o te ra'i! [5]	*E na ta'ata e tahutahu i te umu e! E tapohe na! E to'e uri! E to'e tea! Te pape! Te miti! Te a'ama o te umu! Te ruirui o te umu! A hi'i atu i te tapue avae o te feia e haere nei, a tahiri na i te ahu o te ra'i!*	"Oh men (spirits) [6] who heated the oven! Extinguish the flames! Oh night! Oh day![7] Fresh water and salt water, heat of the oven and redness of the oven, hold up the footsteps of the walkers, fan away the heat of the bed![8]
E te feia toetoe na, e taoto anae tatou i roto i teie nei umu. A mau na, e te vahine-nui-tahu-rai'i, e i te tahiri. E haere na taua i te ropu o te umu!	*E te feia to'eto'e na, e taoto anae tatou i roto i teie nei umu.*	Oh cold beings, let us lie down together in the midst of the oven. Oh Great woman who keeps a sacred fire burning hold the fan and let us go into the oven for a little while!" [9]

of the moon.' The phrase was no doubt a sacerdotal one, and was intended to convey the idea of the states of light and darkness." (Young 1925:214). Kenn (1949:40) translates: "Let the cool darkness and the cool light go to the oven."

[4] Kenn (1949:41) writes in a note "from Miss Teuira Henry's article in J.P.S., vol. 12, p.105 [1893], checked by J.L. Young's article in J.P.S., vol. 34, p. 214-222[1925])."

[5] Henry (1893:107) has "*roi*" (bed).

[6] Young (1925:218) translates "attendants of the fire pit."

[7] Henry (1893:107) translates: "Oh dark earth-worms! Oh light earth-worms!"

[8] Young argues that the word in the ancient ritual is *ra'i* (atmosphere) and not *roi* (or *ro'i*) (bed).

[9] Young (1925:214) argues that Henry's (1893:107) translation "Great-woman-who-sets-fire-to-the-skies" should be "'who tends the fire' or 'who keeps a sacred fire burning'" and hence prefers the expression: "High-Priestess-of-the-Heavens." Huguenin (1902:146), like Kenn, paraphrases Henry in his translation: "grand femme qui met le feu dans les cieux."

E ia ineine anae te ta'ata ra, o ai:	(According to Kenn this is the 1st invocation, upon approaching the *tī* plant)	Then, when everybody is ready to walk in we say:
"Te hi'i tapuae tahi! *Te hi'i tapuae rua!* *T e hi'i tapuae toru!* *Te hi'i tapuae ha!* *Te hi'i tapuae rima!* *Te hi'i tapuae ono!* *Te hi'i tapuae hitu!* *Te hi'i tapuae varu!* *Te hi'i tapuae iva!* *Te hi'i tapuae tini!* *E te vahine-nui-tahu-rai'i! E! Pō'ia!"*	*Te hi'i tapua'e tahi!* *Te hi'i tapua'e rua!* *T e hi'i tapua'e toru!* *Te hi'i tapua'e ha!* *Te hi'i tapua'e rima!* *Te hi'i tapua'e ono!* *Te hi'i tapua'e hitu!* *Te hi'i tapua'e varu!* *Te hi'i tapua'e iva!* *Te hi'i tapua'e tini!* *E te vahine-nui-tahu-rai'i e!*[10] Pō'ia!	"Holder of the first footstep! Holder of the second footstep! Holder of the third footstep! Holder of the fourth footstep! Holder of the fifth footstep! Holder of the sixth footstep! Holder of the seventh footstep! Holder of the eighth footstep! Holder of the ninth footstep! Holder of the tenth footstep! Oh Great woman who keeps a sacred fire burning! All is covered!"
Haere noà tura a ia te ta'ata mai te ino ore na ropu, a n ate hiti o taua umu-tī ra		Then, everybody takes a walk through the oven without hurt, into the middle and around the oven, following the leader (*taua* or *tahua*) with the wand beating from side to side.

[10] Kenn (1949:39) translates like Henry translates: "Great-woman-who-sets-fire-to-the-skies."

In 1964, Maui native Tom Cummings married Raiatean native Teretia Terooatea and followed her to Ra′iātea for five years.[18] In Ra′iātea, Cummings became responsible for narrating the *umu tī* ceremony to the guests of the Bali Hai Hotel. His wife Teretia learned from her father, Tani Terooatea, a Raiatean historian (*orero*) trained by her grandfather, the historian and pastor Tunui Orometua, that firewalking originally came from Fiji, but he did not say exactly when or by whom the ceremony was introduced in Huahine-Ra′iātea. A member of her family, Tiaiho, a *tahua* and healer, performed firewalking in the 1950s in Ra′iātea. Teretia confirmed Kenn's thoughts, saying that in Huahine-Ra′iātea the firewalking ceremony was associated with *mana* and purification and that it was a seasonal celebration held during the harvest. She believes that the ceremony, in respect to the Tahitian deities, included chants referring to the elements of earth, water, and fire. Teretia remembers that during her childhood Ra′iātea was covered in green *tī* plants, whose starchy rhizomes were large and sweet as honey. She confessed that her family never used sugar until she was twenty years old.

Tom Cummings remembers visiting the island of Taha′a (adjacent to Ra′iātea) where he saw the remains of a thirty foot *tī* oven used to cook the *Cordyline*. Oliver (1974:247) believes that such ovens were the sites of *umu tī* ceremonies "partly perhaps because of their suitably large diameters but also because of the direct availability of the ritually necessary *tī* leaves." Carson (2002:349) observes that the main technique for increasing heat in an earth oven is to increase its size, allowing more space for fuel: the larger size accommodates a greater volume of stones that continue to radiate heat, and also accommodates a greater quantity of *tī* rhizomes. Teretia explained to me that these large *tī* ovens were employed to prepare and store large numbers of baked rhizomes, which she remembers were cooked together with the large roots of a wild taro called *'ape*, which would keep the *Cordyline*'s rhizomes moist and tender.[19] Henry provides a description of cooking in the Raiatean *tī* oven:

> The *ti*-roots are…thrown in whole, accompanied by short pieces of *'ape*-root (*Arum costatum*) that are not quite so thick as the *ti*, but grow to the length of six feet and more. The oven is then covered over with large leaves and soil, and left so for about three days, when the *ti* and *'ape* are taken out well cooked, and of a rich, light brown colour. The *'ape* prevents the *tī* from getting too dry in the oven. (Henry 1893:105–6; see also Oliver 1974:247, 250)

[18] Tom Cummings is an educational specialist at the Bishop Museum. He comes from the *hula* storytelling tradition of his mother's sister, *kumu hula* Aunty Mae Loebenstein.

[19] Wild taro (*Arum costatum)* roots, "when baked are palatable, farinaceous, and nutritive, resembling the Irish potato more than any other root in the islands" (Ellis 1829: I, 357–8).

Similarly to Kane's (1993) and Finney's (1999, 2003) observations in relation to the "transferring" of the *'awa* ceremony from Tonga to Hawai'i, the *umu tī* ceremony probably resulted from the frequent cultural exchanges among all Polynesians, where "much enjoyment is derived from exploring the astonishing similarities within the basics of their respective language, custom and tradition. From such similarities, bridges of communication and bonds of friendship are being created; out of these will grow cultural traditions that will be understood by all Polynesians" (Kane 1993 quoted in Finney 1999:26; 2003:72) To put it in a different way, how many of the cultural traits that we regard as "Polynesian" are really ancestral and developed in "Polynesia" and are not shared with the larger Oceanic culture? And how many are relatively recent innovations in Eastern Polynesia and back-introduced to Western Polynesia? Finney observes:

> Without dated examples and representations going back the many centuries it took for Austronesians, and their Pleistocene forerunners, to expand over the Pacific, scholars have been forced to do a lot of guessing to come up with hypotheses about the development of Oceanic sailing craft. Nonetheless, the distribution of different kinds of canoes seen early in the contact era in Remote Oceania (Eastern Melanesia, Micronesia, and Western and Eastern Polynesia) suggests a mixture of diffusion, differentiation, sharing and innovation that makes a mockery of the boundaries we construct by dividing the open Pacific into regions. (Ben Finney, pers. comm.)

The fact that the *umu tī* ceremony (according to Tu-nui Arii-peu and Teretia Terooatea Cummings) did not arrive in Eastern Polynesia Huahine-Ra'iātea until the mid-nineteenth century finds further confirmation in Oliver's treatise on ancient Tahitian society (1974). Oliver points out that "if the early Europeans visitors had seen or heard about such prodigies [*umu tī* ceremonies] they would assuredly have mentioned them" (1974:94). This would also explain the silence of Captain Cook's journals on the *umu tī* ceremony.[20] Cook was often entertained with *heiva* dances and other feasts, but neither his nor his crew's journals mention the *umu tī* practice. It is possible that his ships always arrived in the wrong season, but it is more likely that the ritual was not part of Huahine-Raiatean culture yet. None of the Raiateans who became friendly with Captain Cook appear ever to have discussed or

[20] Ra'iātea was Captain Cook's favorite island. He visited Ra'iātea and Huahine three times: during the first voyage on 20–24 July 1769; during the second voyage on 2–7 and 8–17 September 1773, and 15 May–4 June 1774; and during the third voyage on 12 October–7 November 1777 (Cook 1999[1955–1974]). Cook was not a stranger there. Huahine Chief Orio adopted Cook's name (Toote) and Cook became a British Orio. On 9 September 1773, Orio went to Haamanino harbour to welcome Captain Cook in 1769. They met once more in October 1777 and in November Orio, with some of his men, accompanied Cook to Borabora to recover an anchor that Captain Bougainville had lost there (Thomas 2003).

described it to him. It was evidently never mentioned by Tupaia (or Tupia) of Ra′iātea, an aristocrat, *tahua*, ritual specialist, and skillful navigator, who was a guest on board the *Dolphin* in 1767 and interpreter on the *Endeavour*.[21] Hitihiti (also called Mahine), a high-ranking young chief linked to the Puni chiefly line of Bora Bora, traveled on the *Resolution* to Tonga, New Zealand, Rapa Nui, and the Marquesas from 1773 to 1774 with Captain Cook; he also does not seem to have discussed the *umu tī* ceremony.[22] Mai, or Omai as he came to be known to the British, a native of Ra′iātea who lived in Huahine, joined the *Adventure* in September 1773, becoming the first Polynesian representative to Europe.[23] During the four years he traveled around the world and lived in England, he also does not seem to have mentioned the *umu tī* ceremony.

Both Banks and his assistant Parkinson mention the nutritional properties of the *ʻape* and *tī*, but do not discuss the way the roots were cooked or baked in the *umu tī* (Parkinson 1999[1773]:38, 43; see also Forster, in Nicolson and Fosberg 2004:16).[24] Anecdotal evidence says that Banks and Omai often "competed" in the "cooking of difficult outdoor dishes," but "nothing could be better dress'd, or more savoury [than Omai's dishes], the smouldering pebble-stones and embers of the Otaheitan [Tahitian] oven had given a certain flavour to the fowls, a *soupcon* of smokiness, which made them taste

[21] The *Dolphin*, commanded by Captain Samuel Wallis, spent five weeks in Tahiti from June to July 1767. The *Endeavour* was commanded by Captain Cook on the first voyage. Tupaia died of scorbutus with his servant Tayeto (Taiata) in Batavia in December 1770.

[22] The *Resolution* was commanded by Captain James Cook on his second voyage. Captain William Bligh dined with Hitihiti in 1788 during the *Bounty* expedition and, on returning in 1792, heard that Hitihiti had gone with Captain Edwards of the *Pandora* in search of the *Bounty* mutineers.

[23] The *Adventure* was commanded by Captain Tobias Furneaux, who was more desirous to have Omai on board than was Cook (Thomas 2003:199). Omai traveled around the world and then lived in England from July 1774 to June 1776. On 2 November 1777, under King George III's orders, he was repatriated to Huahine, where Cook purchased him a piece of land and the ships' carpenters built him a house (Home 1777–1779:19–27, 30–41). Alexander Home joined the crew of HMS *Discovery* on 16 March 1776. Of Home we have a folio manuscript, eighteen leaves, and no covers, comprising *inter alia*: "The Account of Ottihiti and Our Transaction there, Continued." The manuscript gives an account of the visit of HMS *Resolution*, commanded by Capt. James Cook, and HMS *Discovery*, commanded by Capt. Charles Clerke, to Tahiti, Sept.–Dec. 1777. It includes notes on Omai's character, the house built for him, and relations with the chiefs Tu and Mahine. Home's son, George Home, wrote the *Memoirs of an Aristocrat and Reminiscences of the Emperor Napoleon* (1838), which contains references to his father's voyages.

[24] Joseph Banks, naturalist and botanist, took part in Cook's first voyage (1768–1771). Sydney Parkinson, a great botanical artist, was employed by Joseph Banks to travel with him on James Cook's first voyage to the Pacific in 1768, and died at sea from malaria in 1771. Georg Forster and his father (Johann Reinhold Forster) were naturalists who accompanied James Cook on his second voyage to the Pacific (1772–1775).

as if a ham accompanied them" (Alexander 1977:126).[25] Banks also describes worship spaces (*marae*) he visited and *tahua*, which he says means "man of knowledge." The *tahua*, according to Banks, were retainers of knowledge about the divinities, astronomy, and navigation (Banks 1963[1896]:381–3). However, he never mentions the *umu tī* ceremony.

In the Cook Islands, Gudgeon and Large state that firewalking ceremonies in Rarotonga and Atiu in the late nineteenth century were organized by Raiatean men. Gudgeon describes a "young man of the Ra′iātea family who are hereditary firewalkers" (1899:60). Large, who saw the ceremony on the island of Atiu, writes that "the proceedings were conducted by a native named Pauro Moari, a *taunga* (priest or skilled man) from Ra′iatea" (1911:1). Likewise, the ceremonies brought to Honolulu between December 1900 and January 1901 were hosted by a Raiatean, Papa-ita, Tu-nui Arii-peu's "grandfather."

In Hawai'i, firewalking seems to have been imported from Tahiti and incorporated into the local cosmogony. In *Nānā i ke Kumu* (Look at the Source), Mary Kawena Pukui discusses the importance of the Tahitian *tī* plant in firewalking:

> No one was able to walk on lava beds cooled just enough to bear one's weight without carrying *tī* leaves. My great-great-grandmother used to walk across hot lava this way and never get burned. Our family line is from the Pele priesthood and Pele is the volcano goddess. So the *tī* leaves invoke Pele's protection. (Pukui et al. 1972:191; see also Long 1954[1948]:29)[26]

Pukui recalls that in her lava-strewn homeland, the Big Island of Hawai'i, sandals made of dried *tī* leaves were used to cross partly cooled lava beds (Handy and Handy 1972:225). According to Pukui, "If a menstruating woman was obliged to cross the volcano goddess' domain, in order to avoid Pele's wrath she wore anklets and bracelets and a *lei* of tī leaves and was accompanied on either side by a man holding up a stalk of tī plant like a flag of truce" (Handy and Handy 1972:222). Pukui also points out that the *menehune* cooked tī roots in earth ovens in the area of Kaimuki (Pukui et al. 1989:28).[27] Buck argues that at the time of the arrival of the *menehune,* the only foods available in Hawai'i

[25] Banks had met Omai during Cook's first trip. During the two years Omai spent in England, Banks had become his mentor.

[26] Mary Abigail Kawena-'ula-o-ka-lani-a-hi'iaka-i-ka-poli-o-pele-ka-wahine-'ai-honua Wiggin Pukui, teacher, historian, author, translator, *kumu hula*, and composer, worked for many years at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, and, along with Samuel Elbert, co-authored the *Hawaiian Dictionary* (1957).

[27] *Menehune* are a "legendary race of small people, who worked at night, building fish ponds, roads, temples" (Pukui and Elbert 1986[1957]: 246). In Tahiti, a similar term was used for the third class into which people were divided: the laborers, the commoners, and the *manahune*. Fornander argues that Hawaiians adopted the term to refer to a legendary race of skillful, cunning dwarves (Fornander 1973[1878–1885]: 55).

were "the fruit of pandanus, the pith of the tree fern, the root of the *Cordyline* (*tī*), and the berries of the *ohelo* and *akala*" (Buck 1959[1938]:258). Carson suggests that in Hawai'i, *tī* ovens were made only on rare occasions, dictated by famine (Carson 2002:345–6; see Fankhauser 1986:9; Malo 1951[1898]:43). According to Buck:

> Formerly, the underground stem was cooked in the earth oven, then chewed like sugar cane. In times of famine, large ovens of **tī** root were prepared by the community and the Honolulu suburb of Kaimuki (*ka imu ki*) is said to have obtained its name from such an oven (*imu*). (Buck 1957:11)[28]

Similarly, Handy and Handy point out that:

> In old Hawaii the [*tī*] root steamed in the *imu* was a favorite sweet, chewed like sugar cane… In famine times *tī* roots were gathered from the forest in large quantities and steamed in great ovens, then grated, mashed, mixed with water, and drunk. It is said that there was a famous oven of this sort east of Honolulu at Kaimuki (*Ka-imu-ki*, "The-ti-oven"). At Ke'anae, Maui, there was likewise a great *imu ki*. (Handy and Handy 1972:224)
>
> The place name Ka-imu-ki, meaning "the-*ti*-oven" refers to a time of drought when a great ground oven was made for steaming roots of the *tī* (*ki*) plant, which was one of the emergency foods gathered in the uplands there. (Handy and Handy 1972:275)

Firewalking was also probably brought to Aotearoa by Polynesian voyagers (Fornander 1973[1878–1885]; Percy-Smith 1921[1898]).[29] The presence of the ceremony by the early twentieth century was confirmed by Best (1924) and Hammond (1924).[30] Best was not aware of any special name assigned to the *umu* used for the firewalking ceremony in Aotearoa (Best 1924:205). However, he observes that "a native tradition has it that the name of Paraparaumu (a place near Pae-kakariki) is connected with a performance

[28] The earliest historic references regarding the cooking of *tī* roots describe the production of fermented liquor, *'ōkolehao* (alcohol), which was also brewed in Tahiti (Ellis 1853:130–1, 1963:184; Handy and Handy 1972:224; Portlock 1789: 91). This may be similar to the fermented drink brewed by Tahitians for Chief Cokanauto in Beqa.

[29] Several legends, chants, and oral accounts, mainly Māori, talk about frequent voyages from and to Fiji (also Iti or Whiti). A number of tales cluster about a hero-deity named Tawhaki (also Taaki, Kahai), an intrepid navigator of the "heroic period" (700 A.D.) who reached Fiji and ascended a mountain called Whiti-haua. Percy-Smith believes that three fierce semi-monsters named Whiti, Matuku, and Peka, described in the legend, correspond to islands: Viti (Levu), Matuku (Lau), and Peka (Beqa). See also later voyaging accounts in 1250 A.D. describing Tangiia who reached Rapa Nui from Fiji; Iro (Whiro, Hiro, Hilo); Turi from Ra'iātea who sailed his canoe *Aotea* from Tahiti to Aotearoa, and so on (Fornander 1973[1878–1885]; Percy-Smith 1921[1898]).

[30] Also indirectly, by Carson 2002; Fankhauser 1986, 1993; Henry 1928; Langley 1901; Washburn-Hopkins 1910–1927; and Young 1925.

of fire-walking at that place" (ibid.). Best collected twenty-eight special names for the *ahi tapu* (sacred fires) and twenty-one names for special *umu tapu* (sacred ovens) in which food was cooked for ceremonial feasts. Among disparate uses including divination, making war charms, hunting, fishing, canoe building, protecting the crops, tattooing, black magic, exhumation, and averting evil omens, the *ahi amoamohanga* ceremony was a specific rite connected with offerings of first fruits (*amoamohanga*) to the gods to remove harmful influences.

Hammond remembers that when Fijians came to the New Zealand International Exhibition in Christchurch in November 1906 to perform their firewalking ceremony, the Māori people he conversed with in different parts of New Zealand "all agreed that at one time there were men among them who knew the secret, but it is now forgotten" (1924:61). He continues:

> At Temuka, South Island, during a visit paid to the Maoris, I was surprised to find the correct name was not Temuka, but Te Umukaha (a fierce oven). On making inquiries I found the name had relation to the cooking of the roots of the cabbage tree [*Cordyline australis*][31] and the ceremony of fire-walking… The Patea and Waitotara Maoris assured me that the ceremony of fire-walking was at one time quite common among their ancestors, and that they had a very clear traditional knowledge of that peculiar function. (Hammond 1924:61)[32]

The information collected by Best and the multiple functions of *umu*-related rituals among the Māori tribes of Aotearoa suggest that a single ritual may be performed for a variety of reasons or belong to several classifications. This might explain the presence of similar rituals among the Apma-speaking area of central Pentecost Island in Vanuatu, where fire-walking ceremonies were part of a type of initiation for young men.[33] The "fire-leaping ceremonies" in northern Pentecost and Maewo islands, however, may "have something to do with celebrating the new yams" (Regenvanu, pers. comm.).[34] In Biak, West Papua, the Manwor clan has been using firewalking to attract

[31] Amino acid analysis of oven residues shows that Māori used large *umu tī* to bake the cabbage tree, *Tī kāuka* (*Cordyline australis*) (Fankhauser 1993:19).

[32] Best and Hammond both mention the Ngati-Kahungunu tribe of Te Wairoa, the Ngati-Awa tribe of Te Teko, and the Tuhoe tribe as custodians of traditional knowledge (Best 1924; Hammond 1924).

[33] The tourist website www.pocruises.com.au/html/ advertises firewalking at Sunma Village, on Efate Island, Vanuatu. However, a couple of graduate students from New Zealand who traveled through Vanuatu, that I interviewed at the Naviti Resort in Fiji, discredited it as a spurious ceremony. Regenvanu also warned me about that performance (email, 9 April 2006). For the purpose of this study, I exclude the North Baining, New Britain fire-dance (*atut*) involving masked dancers running through a bonfire kicking branches or embers (Clark 1976; Fajans 1997).

[34] Ralph Regenvanu is the Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (email, 9, 10 April 2006).

tourists. Rumakiek, a West Papuan political refugee from the Arwam tribe who moved to Suva in 1970, told me that the first time he saw the Beqan *vilavilairevo* in Fiji the hairs on his arms stood up because of its striking resemblance to a ceremony originally performed by his people. Originally the *wor-barapen* ceremony was performed on important events and after a ceremonial procession of initiation. The young men (*kaborinsos*) who had just been initiated were supposed to follow their spiritual leader walking over the earth oven's (*barapen*) hot stones.

Firewalking in Beqa

After Tupaia showed Captain James Cook that systematic intentional voyaging in the Pacific was a matter of knowledge of astronomy, tides, weather, and so on, and after Omai discovered some Tahitians in the Cook Islands in 1777, Cook immediately wrote in his journal that these incidents "explain better than the thousands conjectures of speculative reasoners, how the detached parts of the earth, and, in particular, how the South Seas, may have been peopled" (Cook and King 1785a:200–2, quoted in Irwin 1996[1992]:14). Percy-Smith and Fornander inform us that around 650 A.D., voyages of discovery originating from Fiji had begun. Fiji at that time represented the headquarters of Polynesian society; its colonies in Tonga and Sāmoa were rendezvous points on the way from remote Oceania to East Polynesia (Percy-Smith 1921[1898]:171; Fornander 1973[1878–1885]:II, 2).

Irwin argues that by the end of the eighteenth century, many Pacific islanders around Oceania were related to one another and shared common origins in the west, not the east (Irwin 1996[1992]:15). By the early nineteenth century, Tahitian and Fijian crews were being exchanged on commercial brigs traveling between Melanesia and Polynesia.[35] For example, in 1834, the Tahitian crew from the *Charles Dogget* was working in Kadavu, Fiji, and in 1836 Tahitian teachers were stationed on Oneata, also in Fiji (Cargill 1977[1832–1843]:37; Derrick 2001[1946]:69, 72).[36] In the 1840s, the *Havannah*'s captain and Reverend Jaggar noted that Cokanauto (known as Mr. Phillips), a Rewa chief who had been on Captain Eagleston's brig *Peru* and was later taken to Tahiti, spoke fluent Tahitian (Derrick 2001[1946]:96;

[35] By the 1840s, missionary ships were sailing the same waters. In 1847, Mary Wallis-Davis reports that Cakobau was concerned about France's intention to send more missionaries to Fiji from Tahiti (1847) (Wallis 1983[1851]:255).

[36] In September 1830, Captain William Driver took the brig *Charles Doggett* to Tahiti, where he brought on board sixty-five exiled survivors of the *Bounty* and repatriated them to Pitcairn Island (Paine 1912:375–6).

Erskine 1987[1853]:461; Henderson 1931).[37] At that time, Beqa was under Rewa's chiefdom.[38]

Cokanauto, described by Derrick as "dissolute and besotted," was supplied of a grog "distilled at Beqa by his own Tahitians, made from bananas, sugar-cane, and the root of the wild dracaena [*Cordyline*] (*ti*)," of which he and his circle consumed three or four gallons a day (Derrick 2001[1946]:105; Diapea 1928;[39] Erskine 1987[1853]).[40] This description reveals that the sweet rhizomes of *Cordyline*, which were indispensable to preparing a mulled alcoholic beverage for chief Cokanauto, grew copiously on Beqa. Thomson begins his account of a *vilavilairevo* ceremony held in Beqa in September 1892 by focusing on this plant:

> Once every year, the *masawe*, a dracaena [*Cordyline*] that grows in profusion on the grassy hillside of the island, becomes fit to yield the sugar of which its fibrous root is full. To render it fit to eat the roots must be baked among hot stones for four days. A great pit is dug, and filled with large stones and blazing logs, and when these have burned down and the stones are at white heat, the oven is ready for the *masawe*. (Thomson 1894:195)

From Thomson's account, I also deduce that the ritual performed by the Naivilaqata of the Sawau tribe in the 1890s had not yet become commodified and transformed into an exotic spectacle. Thomson observes that while the *kalou rere* (lit. fearsome deity),[41] was one of those offences punished under the British law with flagellation, "in one corner of Fiji [Beqa] a curious observance of mythological origin has escaped the general destruction"

[37] On the same day (8 June 1831) that Mr. Phillips joined the *Peru*, Captain Benjamin Vanderford, formerly on the *Clay*, Captain Brown, formerly on the *Niagara,* and four men of the *Glide*, all vessels from Salem, wrecked in Fiji on the way to China with their cargo of bêche-de-mer. They were picked up by Captain John H. Eagleston (Paine 1912:398). Both Eagleston and Vanderford were employed as pilots and interpreters for Commodore Charles Wilkes' famous expedition through the Pacific. Vanderford died on 22 March 1842, three months before reaching Fiji.

[38] Tahitians are remembered on Beqa to have lived at Nawaisomo. That Nawaisomo is today considered closely related to Rewa (*vasu ni Rewa*) leads me to assume that Nawaisomo in the 1840s was still under Rewa's dominion (Crosby 1988b:140).

[39] William Diapea, also known as "Diaper," John Jackson, and "Cannibal Jack," was apparently kidnapped while on a whaling voyage by a group of Samoans. He spent four months with them and a further seven years in Fiji (1840–1847). Part of his narrative was published as an appendix to Captain John Erskine's *Journal* (1987[1853]). Another part of his story, based on a manuscript in the possession of the Reverend James Hadfield, was published in 1928 under the title *Cannibal Jack: The True Autobiography of a White Man in the South Seas*. The complete manuscript in nineteen copybooks spoken of by Diapea have never been recovered.

[40] In 1851, at forty years old, Cokanauto died of dysentery aggravated by his alcohol consumption (Derrick 2001[1946]:105).

[41] Fison (1867) reports also about the *kalou rere*, a society he reconnects to an old priest of Rakiraki who dispensed *wai ni tuka* (water of tuka), an elixir of immortality.

(Thomson 1968[1908]:171). This is confirmed by earlier accounts by Reverend Waterhouse (1997[1866]:284–5) and Brewster (1967[1922]:258), both pointing out that firewalking was exclusively the hereditary privilege of the Naivilaqata. During the forty years Brewster spent in Fiji, he never saw the "wonderful performance of the fire-walkers of the Island of Mbenga [*sic*], who in their ceremony of the *vilavilairevo* walk unharmed across the red-hot stones of a huge native oven," but did meet men from the Sawau tribe who described it to him (Brewster 1967[1922]:258). [42]

It is probably impossible to establish when the *vilavilairevo* ceremony was first introduced to Beqa. However, after reconstructing the Sawau tribe's oral accounts, it appears certain that by the time the Sawau occupied the hilltop fortification of Navakaisese between the chieftaincies of Ratu Golea and Ratu Drauniivilevu at the end of the eighteenth century, the "gift" of the *vilavilairevo* was already their exclusive possession.[43] Since then, *vilavilairevo* has remained unique to the Sawau of Beqa. It has never been claimed by any other clan or tribe throughout Fiji. Paul Geraghty observes that "all specifically associated terms with *vilavilairevo* in Beqa, they are all very Fijian; none of them seems [to have] been borrowed from Tahiti or somewhere else. They are very Beqan words. In Tahiti, it is not surprising that the ritual of *umu tī* has absorbed and incorporated the Tahitian cosmogony (Geraghty, pers. comm.).[44] A lexicon of *umu tī* terms used in Beqa and Ra'īātea shows that the terms are unique to the local Beqa dialect. For example, *vilavilairevo* is *rikata na lovo* in Fijian/Bauan; *masawe* is *vasili* in Fijian/Bauan; and there is no word for *matagi* (the red *Cordyline*)[45] in Fijian/Bauan. Geraghty points out that just because we do not find any Fijian terms in Raiatean does not mean that they did not come

[42] Adolph Brewster, formerly Adolph Joske, arrived in Fiji in September 1870. He worked there until 1910 as the Governor's Commissioner of Colo North and East in the mountain provinces of Viti Levu, the main island.

[43] Oral accounts indicate that while *vilavilairevo* was brought to Navakaisese from Tuiqalita, the first *vilavilairevo* ceremony was performed at Malovo, an upland garden accessible from Navakaisese. According to Carson, *umu tī* were consistently located in the hills, perhaps because *Cordyline* grows in the uplands (2002:355).

[44] Serge Dunis, a linguist at the Université de la Polynésie Française in Tahiti, also agrees that the ritual might have originated in Fiji (pers. comm.).

[45] In Beqa, *bete levu* (high priest) Sevanaia Waqasaqa (1916–2007) used the term *matagi* to indicate red *Cordyline*. *Matagi* or *matangi* is a Polynesian (Samoan, Tongan, Tikopian, Tahitian, and Māori) term meaning wind (*cagi* in Fijian, pronounced "thangi"). The word is everywhere associated with *tī*: *tī matagi* (Sāmoa), *tī matangi* (Tikopia), *tī rau matangi* (Rarotonga), *tī matani* (Tonga) (Ehrlich 1999: 495). Hocart discusses the "Matangi Women" of Lau, Fiji, also called the "Two Ladies" (*ko i rau a marama*). These two goddesses, the "mother of bad desire and mother of good desire" of Waitabu (Taveuni island) were "good for war, sickness, all things that men are in need of they bring to pass" (Hocart 1929: 214–5).

from Fiji; it might mean that when they came they were "indigenized" to suit the local dialect (Geraghty, pers. comm.).[46]

I suspect that the *vilavilairevo* ceremony was not a "latter-day ceremony" as Oliver (1974:94) believes, but that it was acquired before Christianity was introduced to Beqa. I suggest that the ceremony was performed by members of the Naivilaqata clan of the Sawau *yavusa* of Beqa as a regulative practice, in that it regulated practical activities. A comparative example is how agricultural rites in the Trobriand Islands are interwoven with the technical activities of gardening, while also encoding aesthetic values and mythical associations, and anticipating the success of the next yam harvest (Tambiah 1985). Similarly, the land dive (*nagol*) ritual in South Pentecost island in Vanuatu was always performed in association with the yam harvest (Jolly 1994). In Beqa, the cultural elaboration of the *vilavilairevo* emerged from a rite of increase that regulated the practical activity of harvesting and cooking of *masawe* roots (Allardyce 1904; Lindt 1893; Roth 1933; Thomson 1894).

Walking on hot stones and consuming *Cordyline* rhizomes constitute related ancestral Polynesian stratagems adopted in response to subsistence's exigencies in a resource poor and unpredictable island environment. Reserves were limited and there were periods of scarcity due to drought, floods, and cyclones.[47] Ancestral Polynesian food preservation strategies included sun-

[46] He observes "when the rifle was introduced into Fiji, [instead of calling it a rifle] it was called the *dakai*, which is the old Fijian term for a bow and the gun powder itself was called *nuku* which means sand, so all the introduced terminology was completely Fijianized" (Geraghty, pers. comm.).

[47] For example, Beqa's oral accounts from the nineteenth century conserve a memory of surviving a great flood caused by the snake god, Degei (Brewster 1922:90; Fornander 1973[1878–1885]:88–89; Thomson 1968[1908]:18; Waterhouse 1997[1866]:252–3; Wilkes 1845:207). Degei, part serpent, part stone, and supreme god and creator of the Fijian world, fruits, and men "deluged the world in punishing the sin of his rebellious creatures" (Waterhouse 1997[1866]:250–1). The stone aspect is "significant of eternal duration" (Waterhouse 1997[1866]:251). According to Brewster, Degei originally came from Sāmoa. His totem being a snake, ancestral worship deified him and subsequently he became known under that form only. "All ancestral spirits or originating spirits had totems, whose shapes they could take, resuming their own again at will. The transformation is called *lia*, and Ndengei [Degei] was *lia eng-ata* (change into snake), that is he could become a serpent at will and man again whenever he desired (Brewster 1922:84–85). While Reverend Joseph Waterhouse finds an analogy between the flood ordered by Fijian supreme snake god Degei, irate about the killing of his favorite bird Turukawa, and Noah's flood (Waterhouse 1997[1866]: 252–3), Father Jean de Marzan argues that the deluge in Fiji was "partial" and not "universal"; thus he sees no connection with the one described in the Bible. It should be noted that the story of a Great Flood sent by God or the gods to destroy civilization as an act of divine retribution is a widespread theme in Polynesian mythology (including in Ra'iātea, Tahiti, the Marquesas, Hawai'i). The world's cultures past and present have stories of a great flood that devastated earlier civilization, which Eliade interprets as "a restoration of primordial chaos" (Eliade 1971[1954]: 59). Interestingly, in de Marzan's myth reconstruction, it emerges that the island of Beqa was not submerged, for Rokowa ("the Noble Flood Tide" [Brewster

drying, smoking, or baking taro and other plants in order to store them for months (Kirch and Green 2001:159). Analysis of *Cordyline fruticosa* and *terminalis* roots and stems reveals that they contain a soluble poly-saccharide composed mainly of fructose. The root was also baked and stored to supply carbohydrates (Carson 2002; Fankhauser 1986). Counihan (1999) argues that food scarcity mirrors and exacerbates social distinctions, as studies on the cultural context of the Fijian body, bodily aesthetics, food exchange, care, and social cohesion delineate (Becker 1995; Deane 1921; Spencer 1941). Counihan (1999) and Mintz (1985) observe that sugar reproduces and sustains hierarchy and power. Initially a desirable commodity prerogative of the higher social circles, eventually sugar became an emulative icon accessible to and ostentated by the lower ones. Undoubtedly, baking of the sweet (*gasagasa*)[48] *Cordyline* constituted the central part of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony.

The final chant was added in the 1960s, in Rukua. The popular song is obviously of modern origin ("London," "telephone").[49] It was not intended for the *vilavilairevo* ceremony, but was introduced by Sawau groups from Beqa to mark the end of the performance for tourists who would not know it was not traditional.[50]

The *qalu* pudding made of *dalo* (taro) and *masawe* is like *vakalolo*, a Fijian pudding prepared with coconut milk. *Qalu* does not include coconut milk because the *veli* dislike it. The *qalu* was thin and only small amounts were prepared, since the *veli* are smaller than men. It was cooked on top of the *lovo* used for *vilavilairevo.* The *dalo* and the *masawe* were first baked on the *lovo*, then cut and mixed together to make a pudding. The pudding was then wrapped in banana leaves, tied up, and presented (*cabo*) as thanksgiving (*na ka ga ni vakavinavinaka*) by the *bete* to the *veli*. Everybody in the village was then

1922:90]) desperately looking for the god-like canoe Rogovoka ("the Far Famed Ebb" [ibid.]) has to step with one foot on Beqa and the other on Naitata Flats, a coral reef formation south of Navua (de Marzan 1972b[ca. 1891–1925]:1). Fornander assumes that "all agree that the highest places were covered, and the remnant of the human race saved in some vessel, which was at last left by the subsiding waters of Mbenga [*sic*]; hence the Mbengans [*sic*] draw their claim to stand first in Fijian rank" (Fornander 1973[1878–1885]:88–89). Furthermore, Thomson disagrees with Fornander's chronology, observing that the only way to calculate dates in Fiji are the natives' genealogies calculated by generations. Every district in Fiji has its own tradition and he assumes that the floods occurred in Rewa and Bua provinces in the last 125 years (mid-eighteenth century), and "have already been canonized in the realm of myth" (Thomson 1968[1908]:18; see also Gordon-Cumming 1901[1881]:348).

[48] In Beqan dialect, *gasagasa* corresponds to Fijian/Bauan *kamikamica*.

[49] See also Wright in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, August 1951:27.

[50] The groups from Yanuca Island use the same melody, but different lyrics from a recent composition by Peceli Vitukawalu called *Sere ni Vila* (A Song of Firewalking). The song states that the arrival of Europeans or "Christianity did not reduce the power of the little people of Tui Namoliwai [*Sa gauna ni lotu eqo e sega ni malumu mai kaukauwa tikoga Tui Namoliwai*]" (quoted in Crosby 1988b:70–71).

welcome to consume it. Miriama Naioro, granddaughter of *bete levu* Sevanaia Waqasaqa (1866–1938), daughter of a firewalking mother and father, and briefly in the 1960s a firewalker herself, explains:

> *Eratou cakava ko ratou na bete. Ena kau ga mai na dalo me mai caka, e rua beka ga na dalo baleta na lewe ni vakalolo qo e dau ka lalai. Na drau ni vasili ga na kenai olo. Me kua ni vakasuka, na kena suka na wai ni vasili e dau vavi. Ni caka vakaoqo e kamikamica saraga me vaka na suka. Ena laki biu ga, tukuni ga mei madrali e sa caka sara na kana.*
>
> It is the *bete* who prepares it. To make the pudding, often a couple of pieces of *dalo* [taro] is enough, for the portions must be small. Then it is wrapped with a *vasili* [*Cordyline*] leaf.[51] It does not need to be sweetened. The baked cordyline provides the sweetness to the ingredients of the pudding. Its sweet syrup extracted is just like sugar. After it is prepared, the *madrali* is announced and eating begins. (Naioro, pers. comm.)

Neither Legend nor Folktale

Old myths grow and new ones are born, Leeming (2002:19) observes, but in Huahine-Ra'iātea only the prototypical language of the *umu tī* invocations recurs (cf. Tupua in Henry 1893:106–7 and Young 1925:216–7; Kenn 1949:38–42). The Huahine-Raiatean *umu tī* tradition does not include any legend that associates it with a particular ancestor or member of a certain clan or tribe. This is unusual in Polynesian mythology, for ritual acts always had explicit meanings (Oliver 1974:111).

Almost every ritual can be referred back to some myth (Berndt and Berndt 1964:226). Leach (after Durkheim) postulates that myth implies ritual, ritual implies myth: myth is in words while ritual is in action (Leach quoted in Kirk 1971:23 and Rappaport 1999:151). For Kluckhohn, myth and ritual have a common psychological basis: ritual is a symbolic dramatization of the needs of a society and mythology is the realization of the same needs (Kluckhohn 1942:78). In Austin's (1979) terms, myth without ritual has at best perlocutionary but not illocutionary force.

Unlike in the Huahine-Raiatean tradition, all the early accounts of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony contain a version of the *italanoa* (story) of *nai tekitekivu ni vilavilairevo* (how firewalking began) in Beqa.[52] To be more than transitory and become traditional, tales must accommodate the collective identity

[51] *Vasili* and *qai* mean *masawe* in Fijian/Bauan.

[52] Notable are those from *Na Mata* 1885, n.a. (translated by Jackson 1894); Thomson 1894; Toganivalu 1914 (translated by Beauclerc); Bulivou (recorded and translated in 1978 by Mika Tubanavau in Crosby 1988a); and Kuruiwaca (recorded by Pigliasco and Cavakiqali in 2004, translated by Sipiriano Nemani).

Table 1.2 Ritual steps of the traditional *vilavilairevo* ceremony

Vilavilairevo **ceremony (present time)**	**Ritual steps**
Preparation	Before the ceremony the *bete* in charge of the ceremony and some *dauvila* (firewalkers) collect enough *drau ni balabala* (dry leaves of tree fern *Cyathea lunulata*) to make anklets (*vesa ni yava*) and *drau ni dogo* (mangrove leaves, *Rhizophora mangle*), commonly referred to as *draunikau ba*, to cover the pit at the end of the performance.
Heating the *lovo*	Once the *lovo* has been heated for 3–4 hours with logs placed under the stones, the *vilavilairevo* ceremony can commence.
Presentation to the spectators	The presentation of the performance is designed and organized by hotels and cultural centers in specific firewalking arenas. In most cases each step of the ceremony is commented upon by an MC. Archival records suggest that in the past there was no presentation or explanation of the ceremony to the eyewitnesses (Allardyce 1904; Lindt 1893; Roth 1933; Thomson 1894).
1st call — *Na Kau* (wooden poles, *na i uso*)	The *bete* supervises the *dauvila* in removing all the burned braches from the vatu (stones) and clearing the surface of the stones of any embers.
2nd call — *Wa lai* (large vine, *Entada scandens*)	The *bete* supervises the arrangement of the stones by the *dauvila*, who drag them with large vines, rolling them into position until all the stones are level inside the *lovo*.
3rd call — *Balabala* (tree fern *Cyathea lunulata*)	Two *dauvila* carry a long tree fern stalk (*waqabalabala*). It is laid across the pit according to the specific direction indicated by the *bete*. This is the most important aspect of the preparation of the ceremony, for it is believed that hundreds of *veli*, the little gods of firewalking, are hanging on it and that they will lie on the stones allowing the *dauvila* to walk on their backs without getting burned.[1] After all the stones are arranged, the *dauvila* exit the pit's grounds, waiting for the 4th call.
4th call — *O vutu* ("everything is ready")	All the *dauvila* re-enter the ceremonial grounds. The *bete* divides them in four groups which will perform four rounds, crossing the *lovo* from the four cardinal directions indicated by the *bete*.

[1] *Veli* are fairy creatures or gnomes found in the mountainous areas of Fiji.

Chant

After the firewalking, the *dauvila* cover the pit with mangrove leaves (*draunikau ba*; *Rhizophora mangle*). The *dauvila* squatting near the smoking *lovo* or (among the Soliyanga and Naceva) sitting or standing on the mangrove leaves on the *lovo* then chant the following song.

Rogo saka na wekada	Listen my dear relatives
Na italanoa u sa dolava	The story I'm going to reveal
Na italanoa ni vanua yawa	The story of a far land
Ko au na gone mai wasawasa	I'm the child from the sea
Na daunivucu nei Dakuwaqa.	I'm the composer of Dakuwaqa[2]
Tiko voli ma lodoni	I was in London
E rorogo na domo ni talevoni	The phone rang,
Talevoni toka mai Naidovi	a call from Naidovi
Na italanoa u sa kerea	I then asked him to reveal
Meu bau rogoca.	the story to me.
Yaco mai kau sa qai galu	After I heard the story I was speechless
E qeqera tu na wai ni mataqu	Tears rolled down my face
Sa yali e dua na Salulasu	We've lost a dear one
Dou sa bula Saka na wekaqu	Bula relatives of mine
Me rogoci na noqu italanoa	Please hear my story
Ko iau e dua na luveni lota	I'm one of the children of the Lord
Na noqu i tavo e vakaloloma.	My behavior is not good.

[2] Dakuwaqa, the guardian of the reef entrance to the islands, assumes human form with a shark tattooed on his belly. Worshipped under different names throughout Fiji, the shark god is described as living in a cave below the *bure kalou* (god-house) (Derrick 2001[1946]:12). "(Mr Tooth-for-uncooked-food) is said to have saved Dalia, whose canoe was capsized between Kadavu and Vatulele. The god-shark landed his worshippers at Beqa" (Waterhouse 1997[1866]:264–5). The shark god Masilaca, a close friend of Dakuwaqa, appears in the Tui Sawau's genealogy.

Table 1.3 Changes in the *vilavilairevo* ceremony

Vilavilairevo ceremony (pre-Cession time)	Ritual steps and elements lost, elided, or modified
Time	In the past, the ceremony was calendrical or transitional and was performed during the day. It is now performed throughout the week at the hotels and resorts of Viti Levu and usually in the evenings to obtain the maximum choreographic effect. The actual firewalk takes less than 15 minutes.
Location	In the past, *vilavilairevo* was performed only on Beqa in proximity to the village. In the mid 1950s, they started having occasional performances at the Grand Pacific Hotel, at Albert Park, at the Thurston Botanical Gardens, at the Fiji Museum, at the former Government House, and at the Hibiscus Festival. Today, with the exception of a few groups performing for the resorts or tourists coming to Beqa, *vilavilairevo* is mainly performed on Viti Levu.
Firewalkers (*dauvila*)	In the past, only the *dauvila* related to the Naivilaqata (priestly clan) of the Sawau tribe were allowed to perform. Today the ritual is extended to other groups within the Sawau tribe and has also been appropriated by non-authorized members of other tribes outside Beqa.
Taboos	Until the 1960s, *tabu* restrictions on sexual intercourse and consumption of coconut milk were observed for a month before the ceremony. These restrictions were reduced to a couple of weeks and today are practically ignored.
Summoning	In the past, several accounts (especially from Rukua) maintain that the day before the *vilavilairevo*, the *bete* placed thin vines over cracks in the ground and across the stream around the Namoliwai river region to facilitate the coming of the *veli* to the ceremony. This is no longer done.
Balabala (tree fern, *Cyathea lunulata*)	In the past, the *drau ni balabala* (leaves) were collected solely from the tree ferns of the Namoliwai river. Today, leaves from any tree fern (*Cyathea lunulata*), even outside Beqa, are acceptable.
Costumes	In the past, the preparation of the costumes took more than a month and involved the labor of the whole village. In addition, *Cordyline* leaves were tied to the wrists of the *dauvila*. Today, the *Cordyline* leaves are not part of the costume nor are they placed around the *lovo* as in Tahiti. Instead, handpainted *kiekie* (skirts) made with durable, colored *voivoi* (*Pandanus caricosus*) and *salusalu* (Pandanus neck garlands) are re-used from performance to performance.

Size of the *lovo*	In the 1930s, the *lovo* was over 15 feet across. Today, the firewalking arenas at most hotels are sometimes less than half that size.
Shape of the *lovo*	In the past, villagers dug a steep pit, hence the name *vilavilairevo*, 'jumping-into-the-*lovo*'. Since the mid 1950s, the stones have been piled up to allow a better view of the *dauvila* stepping on them.
Shape of the stones	In the past, the stones (*vatu*) were very large and used solely for the *vilavilairevo* and baking *masawe*.[1]
Heating the *lovo*	In the past, heating large *lovo* required a tremendous amount of firewood and 6 to 8 hours of heating.
Participation	Participants formerly included at least 14 pairs (28 people). The practice of walking in pairs remained in use in Rukua until the late 1970s. Today, with all the commitments at different hotels, in some cases there are less than 6 *dauvila* at a performance and they mostly walk single file.
Gender	The *vilavilairevo* was traditionally performed solely by men of the Sawau tribe. For a short period of time in the 1960s, following the request of a hotel manager, *bete levu* (high priest) Pita Koroisavulevu allowed women from the Sawau tribes to perform.
Abeyancy	In the past, before the ceremony, the *dauvila* hid in a hut outside the ceremonial grounds waiting for the call of the *bete* to perform.
Style of fire-walking	In the past, the *dauvila* took a long concentric walk on the hot stones. Today, the walk is limited to crossing the fire-pit from four cardinal points.
Baking the *Cordyline* (*masawe* or *matagi*)	The *draunikau ba* leaves that cover the *lovo* were originally used to protect the *masawe* while they were baked for four days. In the 1950s, baking the *masawe* was discontinued and the roots were only placed in part of the *lovo* symbolically. Today, no *masawe* are put in the *lovo* intended for a firewalk.
Thanksgiving offering (*madrali*)	The offering (*cabo*) to the *veli* of a pudding (*qalu*) made of taro mixed with baked *masawe* sugar has been discontinued.

[1] Sometimes the firewalking stones are improperly called *qoca*, but *qoca* are smaller stones heated in the *lovo* to bake food.

formation, memory, tastes, and ambitions of a society (Kirk 1971:282). The *italanoa* of the *vilavilairevo* has been constantly reaffirmed among the Sawau people, not just as an explanation of the ritual, but as the rationale for their having been given possession of this gift. It is a testimony to the Sawau's own society, culture, and modes of thought (Ben-Amos 1992).

In a western classificatory sense, the *italanoa* of how *vilavilairevo* began in Beqa can be assimilated to the genre of an ancient "myth," which is inherently believed to be true.[53] A myth's characters are both human beings and animals who sometimes have strange powers, but are not necessarily worshipped or propitiated.[54] They explain the origin of natural or cultural phenomena such as the changing of the seasons, cooking, or pottery-making. Eliade argues that "every myth shows how reality came into existence, whether it to be the total reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment, an island, a species of plant, a human institution" (Eliade 1959:97). The narrative of the gift of *vilavilairevo* represents a typical Polynesian exchange system and reciprocal social relations (Pigliasco forthcoming).

The *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* origins is constituted by the storyteller, the performance, and the context (Ben-Amos 1992:111). The storyteller articulates the narrative tradition and is the illocutionary vehicle for its continuity and transformation. Tales are dependent on a number of variables in the storyteller: personal temperament, experience, verbal proficiency, and gender. Performance, in the case of the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo*, is represented in both the storyteller's artistic responsibility as well in the perlocutionary performativeness implicit in the tale (Schechner 1994; Tambiah 1979). Each variant of the tale reinterprets the sequence of verbal utterances, acts, and gestures performed by Tuiqalita and Tui Namoliwai. These include: Tuiqalita promising a gift to the storyteller; Tuiqalita discovering Tui Namoliwai; Tui

[53] For Athenian philosopher Plato, the word *mythologia* meant no more than story-telling, usually about legendary figures and imaginative accounts of supernatural events. Myths start their life as simple tales, something uttered in a wide range of senses, not necessarily connected with religion but rich with symbolic imagery that establishes a context for humans within the cosmos, defines our relationship with supernatural powers, and depicts the deeds of deities and superhuman heroes (Ashliman 2004:32). They are ritualized speech acts (*mythos*) passed down from generation to generation that have become traditional sacred beliefs. Kirk (1971), after Boas and Benedict, notes a mobility from one genre to the other, especially from folktale into myth. Myths that seem no more than paradoxical fantasies often have some serious purpose beyond that of telling a story. Ben-Amos (1992) argues that, while myths are believed to be true, legends purport to be true. In other words, legends possess certain qualities that give the tales verisimilitude, including no happenings that are outside the realm of possibility. Folktales, on the other hand, are inherently untrue; mostly told for pure entertainment, they are self-consciously fictitious oral narratives in which supernatural elements are subsidiary (Ashliman 2004:34; Ben-Amos 1992:102; Kirk 1971:37).

[54] Myths, therefore, do not have the markings of religion (Leeming 1990:4; Lévi-Strauss 1962, 1964).

Namoliwai pleading for his life; Tuiqalita negotiating and accepting the gift of *vilavilairevo*; Tuiqalita and Tui Namoliwai performing the *vilavilairevo*; their agreement and farewell.

Oral narrative performance is context dependent (Ben-Amos 1992:112). The occasion for the *vilavilairevo* narration may be either a formal entertainment associated with the ceremony or an informal entertainment not immediately associated with the ceremony. The story itself is a gift promised to the storyteller for his stories.

> *Na vilavilairevo e a tekivu e na dua na rogo i tukuni. Na dau ni tukuni na yacana o Dredre ka dau kenai vakarau mera dau yalataka vua o ira na mai vakarorogo na nodra nabu (ka ni vakavinavinaka) me ra na kauta mai.*
>
> Firewalking initially began by listening to storytelling. The storyteller's name was Dredre and it was the rule that all those who came to listen to Dredre's stories promised to bring him a gift, a token of appreciation (*nabu*) upon his next visit. (Kuruiwaca, pers. comm.)

A composite version of the rest of the tale is summarized as follows:

> After everybody gathered in the large *bure* called Nakauyama at Navakaisese,[55] Dredre, the story-teller, called upon each man present to name his gift (*nabu*) for him. Tuiqalita (or Tui Qalita), a *bete* of the *mataqali* Naivilaqata, promised to bring an eel he had seen in a hole upstream in the Namoliwai river region. Then Dredre started telling his story and continued until midnight. Early the next morning, Tuiqalita hiked to the upper Namoliwai river to the spot where he remembered seeing the eel. He noticed that something was moving in the murky water. He reached inside with his hand and pulled out a small piece of cloth (*malo*), evidently used by a child. Reaching further down he touched a man's hand, then a head. Tuiqalita firmly caught one arm and hauled his prey out.
>
> At this point, the little man, whose name was Tui Namoliwai, made several offers in exchange for having his life spared by Tuiqalita.[56] First he offered to be Tuiqalita's god of war (*kalou ni valu*), but Tuiqalita declined, arguing that in a recent battle he slew the enemy single-handed, and that Beqa is a small island and he required no assistance.
>
> Next he offered to be Tuiqalita's god of *tiqa* (*kalou ni veitiqa*), but Tuiqalita declined, saying that he was already beating everybody.[57]

[55] A high inland hill fortification, located almost in the heart of the island of Beqa.

[56] The early variants of the tale all mention the same offers (*Na Mata* 1885, translated by Jackson 1894; Thomson 1894; Allardyce 1904; Toganivalu 1914 translated by Beauclerc; Roth 1933; also Bulivou, recorded and translated by Tubanavau in 1978, quoted in Crosby 1988a).

[57] The Fijian game *tiqa* used to be very popular among men in the village. It was played by throwing a reed javelin about four feet long, armed with a pointed piece of hard, heavy wood three to six inches long. It was thrown from the forefinger covered with a piece of cloth. It was thrown so it bounced along the ground; the winner was the man who could throw it farthest.

Then he offered to be Tuiqalita's god of goods (*kalou ni yau*), but Tuiqalita declined, saying that he was receiving plenty of *malo* (cloth) from the nearby island of Kadavu.

Then he offered to be Tuiqalita's god of safe voyages (*kalou ni soko*), but Tuiqalita declined, protesting that he was a landsman and hated sailing.

Then he offered to be Tuiqalita's god of love (*kalou ni yalewa*), but Tuiqalita declined, saying that one woman was sufficient for him, since he was not a big chief.

Finally, Tui Namoiliwai offered Tuiqalita the power over fire. He said then he could be buried in a *masawe lovo* for four days and come out unharmed and alive. Tuiqalita accepted, but suspecting that Tui Namoliwai was deceiving him to kill him, suggested that the gift be simply to pass unharmed through the oven.

Tui Namoliwai and Tuiqalita prepared a large oven, and when the stones were hot, holding hands, they stepped into the pit and walked around it several times.[58] At this point, Tuiqalita told Tui Namoliwai that his life was spared. Finally, Tui Namoliwai promised Tuiqalita that the gift of power over fire would be his and his descendants for ever, whether on Beqa or in Tonga.[59]

Ia ni sa qai la'ki sevutaki sara ni ra sa vavi masawe levu na kai Sawau ki Nalovo [Malovo] edua na yaca ni vanua ko ya sa qai butuka kina ko Tuiqalita era sa kurabui kecega kina ni ra qai raica.

One day, when the Sawau people at Malovo were cooking a large oven of *masawe*, Tuiqalita stepped on it, and all who saw him were astonished at what they saw. (Na Mata 1885:2)

Ni sa caka tale nai karua ni lovo sa qai kerea mera sa cakava I vata me ra tovolea ka vakadinadinataka. Sa qai tekivu mai kea na nodra vila tiko ana tamata me yacova tu mai na siga ni kau. Sa dua na ka kalougata ni mai kunea tu na cauravou koya na isolisoli veivakakurabuitaki koya. Yaco na gauna e muri me ra valuti e Navakaisese ke sa kauta vata tu kei ira na vilavilairevo.

The next time, Tui Qalita asked some of the people to step into the pit with him, which they did, and no one was burned. Much later, when the village of Navakaisese was abandoned, the people took this remarkable gift [*isolisoli*] with them, and still to the present day their descendants practice this unusual power of *vilavilairevo*. (Mika Tubanavau, pers. comm. with Bulivou 1978, quoted in Crosby 1988a:62)

[58] The "holding hands" detail is found only in Aporosa Bulivou's account from Rukua. It explains the different style of firewalking of the Rukuans who walk on the *lovo* in pairs holding hands.

[59] "In Tonga" stands for "in other countries," according to Thomson (1894:201).

Each time the *italanoa* is recited, it emotionally reinforces and validates the ritual and the audience's respect for their ancestors. Each narration re-establishes indexical relationships with paths and sites on Beqa. Narratives transform places into landmarks in time and space, making them monuments of island history (Siikala and Siikala 2005:119, 131). The *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* in Beqa has the character of catharsis, a form of emotional cleansing first recognized by Aristotle. Oceanic and Beqan oral aesthetics recall the empathic effect of the narrative on the audience in response to the actions of the characters in the drama. Characteristic of both Greek and Oceanic myths is the conjunction of stereotypical animal and human characters, unique or surprising feats, having one character encounter both good and bad fortune, and a sudden climax generating pity, sorrow, or laughter in the audience.

The *legomenon* (thing said) becomes the *drõmenon* (thing performed). Cathartic performances are often responses to anxious or fearful situations (Homans 1941:164–72; Tambiah 1968:188). The *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* could have served as the basis for the ceremony in which the ways of humanity and those of nature are psychologically reconciled. In other words, it could have accommodated the evolution of Beqan culture from an age of gods to an age when men and gods mingled freely, allowing both sacred and profane experiences to be manifest (Crosby 1988a). An ontological notion of the world lies behind the *vilavilairevo* ceremony. Building on Durkheim's (1995[1912]) division between positive and negative rites, the *vilavilairevo* ceremony appears to be a "positive" rite in that it brings the sacred and profane realms together, and the ordinary lives of Sawau tribe members become infused with the ideal and the normative.

Neither Ordeal nor Cannibalism

The gift (*isolisoli*) of *vilavilairevo* does not involve negotiating with any evil power; nor is it the result of evildoing. The *madrali* and the use of *waqabalabala* (tree fern stalk; *Cyathea lunulata*) and *draunibalabala* (dry leaves of tree fern) in the *vilavilairevo* ceremony do not involve the presentation or consumption of *yaqona* or *vakadraunikau* (witchcraft, literally "practicing sorcery with leaves"), *vakacuru* (willing possession), or *vakatevoro* (unwilling possession). Furthermore, I argue in this section that the ceremony is neither an ordeal nor a reference to cannibalism.

According to Morinis (1985), the core element of all ordeals of initiation includes infliction of pain in a social context.[60] Grimes distinguishes initiation ceremonies as: rites of childhood that follow birth but precede entry into adolescence; adolescence initiations that facilitate an exit from childhood and entry into adolescence; and adult initiations that negotiate an exit from adolescence and an entry into early adulthood (Grimes 2000:103). Sawau's *vilavilairevo* ceremony does not imply the segmentation of the life cycle into several stages or phases. *Vilavilairevo* seems to have the character of an ordeal but it is not an initiation, since it is neither puberty-related nor a test of faith. Furthermore, the object of firewalking is to pass through fire without loss of life, injury, or pain, so it is not an ordeal.

Rites of passage are based upon the obvious fact of change. Many consist in ritualized ceremonies that challenge the participant physically in order to formalize the leaving of one phase and the entering of another, allowing a new construction of self. The *vilavilairevo* ceremony does not involve any test of character or ability to pass through the next life phase. I observe, however, that the performative dimension—that is, the deliberate, self-conscious "doing" of highly symbolic actions in public, is the key to what makes ritual performance and spectacle different from ordeals of initiation and rites of passage. In Grimes' words "we *undergo* passages, but we *enact* rites" (2000:5; emphasis in original).

With regard to the Oceanic ritual tradition, I separate non-volitional and volitional rites. Initiations and rites of passage are non-volitional and typically characterized by some of the following elements: showing respect, being humiliated or intimidated, undergoing strategic deceptions or surprises perpetrated by elders, gaining access to previously off-limit areas, experiencing disenchantment in the face of revelations, learning sexual or secret knowledge, having to keep secrets from those who are younger or uninitiated, being separated or secluded, overcoming pain, fasting, sleep deprivation, being subject to unpleasant treatment, regressing temporarily to childlike states, experiencing distortion of one's sense of time, space, causality, or identity, having one's status elevated, passing through initiatory levels or degrees, receiving a new name, being received or welcomed by elders, or becoming an initiatory elder. Examples are the Sambia male puberty initiation rites (Herdt 1981, 1982, 1987) and Iatmul scarification or cicatrisation applied to young men at initiation (Bateson 1958[1936]; Bishop *et al.* 2003; Pigliasco and Francalanci 1993; Schäublin-Hauser 1985, 1995; Silverman 2001).

[60] Ordeal by fire as a form of divine judgment can be found in myths from the dawn of Greek tragedy (e.g., Sophocles' *Antigone*, discussed by Benz [1969:241]). Sabbatucci talks about cults where undergoing "ordeal by fire" was evidence of a superhuman reality. "The best known of these powers is the one that allows men to walk unharmed over burning brands or red-hot stones" (Sabbatucci 1987:96).

Performative rites mainly conducted by adults are usually volitional. In some instances, they dramatize bravery and aspects of village social life. They are associated with peril and analgesia but do not involve any change in the status quo. These characterize firewalking ceremonies of Beqa, Tahiti, Biak, Santo and Pentecost islands, the North Baining fire-dance, and Pentecost island's land dive. In Oceania, adults, rather than children, are motivated to perform these empowering rites. Adults recognize that the psycho-physiological, symbolic, and functional effects of pain or risk are instrumental to the goals they are trying to reach in the rite (Morinis 1985).

In Beqa, the techniques of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony are achieved through a cultural, learned, non-obligatory, ritualized practice. *Vilavilairevo* displays elements that appear in traditional ceremonies from various indigenous cultures: being taught by parents or elders; learning and execution of rules; overcoming fear; observing food, sexual, and other behavioral taboos; dramatizing myths; and using costumery. Ceremony is the glue of society (Grimes 2000:122). Victor Turner (1969) observes that ceremonies are rituals that merely confirm the status quo rather than transforming it. In his vision, *ritual* is subversive, so it is the opposite of *ceremony*, which he defines as conserving culture and guarding the normative behavior.

In an article submitted to the *Annals of Tourism Research* in 1994, Stymeist (1996) labeled *vilavilairevo* a "prime example of 'staged authenticity'" and "phoney folk culture" because it was rarely performed by the actual descendants of Tuiqalita (i.e., the Naivilaqata priestly clan). Stymeist argues that "from witnessing the event at close hand, it is apparent that the walking on the hot stones of the lovo is (or can be) a painful experience, truly an ordeal. Vilavilairevo is not always easily and successfully accomplished" (1996:13). Confounding *vilavilairevo* with *kalou rere* and *luveniwai* rites, Stymeist writes that "the many prominent, multivocal references to war and cannibalism in vilavilairevo are unmistakable" (Stymeist 1996:8).

Stymeist seems to base his assumption on the belief that in the past, "before being cut up and baked in the lovo the victims were typically placed in a sitting position and insulted and mutilated" (Stymeist 1996:8). Thus he argues that "after walking across and inside the circumference of the oven four times, vilavilairevo participants sit huddled together in the center of the pit in an action recalling the posture forced upon the slain preparatory to their being cooked. Thus arranged, the participants sing a lele, a dirge or lament offered over the bodies of the dead" (Stymeist 1996:9). Stymeist suggests that *vilavilairevo* "embodies numerous referents to war and cannibalism" (Stymeist 1996:15) and that the ritual is about the symbolic "conquering of the earth-oven in which a human being might be buried and baked" (Stymeist 1996:9). Stymeist appears to draw all these conjectures from an arguably spurious rhymed adaptation of the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo*:

"What may thy name be, libertine?

Methinks a rogue I spy."
The dwarf he sighed and then replied,
"Tui Namoliwai."
"Namoliwai, Namoliwai,
Now, harken unto me,
I sought an eel, but thou this night
Mine offering shalt be."
"The clubbing and the baking whole
Will follow in due course:
But these are items of detail
Which call for no discourse."
(Davidson 1920:93)

Cannibalism in the Fiji islands dates back more than two thousand years (Best 1984; Degusta 1999, 2000; Spenneman 1987). By 1643, when Dutch explorer Abel Tasman arrived in the islands, cannibalism was rampant; it continued for another couple of centuries. Sahlins observes that for over two hundred years Europeans have been trying to find out what moved Fijians to eat each other, but all the explanations have been insufficient (Sahlins 1983:89). The question seems to be not why Fijians practiced cannibalism, but why it was so pervasive and institutionalized (Kirch 2000:160). Similarly, we should not ask why the Sawau people practiced the *vilavilairevo*, but why this practice of allegedly "conquering the oven" did not become pervasive and institutionalized among other tribes at war in Fiji who also used earth ovens. In other words, why, in centuries of exo-cannibalism, should this deflecting practice (of mimicking the *bokola*, i.e., cannibal victims) have become established *only* in Beqa? Beqa is a small island not particularly notorious for cannibalism compared to Rewa, Ra, Bau,[61] Somosomo,[62] and Rakiraki.[63] Elsewhere in Fiji, cannibal orgies were also probably infrequent (Derrick 2001[1946]:21) and confined to ceremonial sacrifices in celebration of victory, the launching of a chief's canoe, or the lowering of a chief's mast (Thomson 1968[1908]:103).

In addition, I observe that the Huahine-Raiatean anthropophagic tradition is not very rich, for in Polynesia human sacrifices were mostly symbolic, involving mutilation and insults in addition to the actual consumption of

[61] Bau was infamous for having cannibal chiefs such as Tanoa, his young brother Ratu Navuaka (Tui Veikoso), and his son Seru (Cakobau) (Thomson 1968[1908]:109; Derrick 2001[1946]).

[62] Somosomo was infamous for renowned man-eaters Tui Cakau and Tui Kilakila (Thomson 1968[1908]:109).

[63] Rakiraki was infamous for Re Undreudre, the most notorious cannibal in the missionary accounts (Thomson 1968[1908]:109; Henderson 1931:57; Derrick 2001[1946]: 22).

the flesh of the victims (Cook 1999[1955–1974] {1773,1777,1785}; Ellis 1853[1829]; Mariner 1817; Oliver 1974; Portlock, 1789; Valeri 1985). Thus, it appears unlikely that, whether the ritual was transmitted from Fiji to Huahine-Ra'iātea or vice versa, an identical ceremony with the same rules and syntactic structure had a completely different function. Nowhere in the Pacific (Ra'iātea-Huahine-Taha'a, Cook Islands, Aotearoa, Vanuatu, Biak, or Hawai'i) was the firewalking ceremony associated with cannibalistic practices. At the same time, in some fringes of Tonga and Sāmoa reached by cannibalism, there is no evidence of firewalking.[64] Cultural forms persist by being kept in existence by their cognitive motivation, or they disappear from the cultural repertoire when their cognitive function becomes for some reason obsolete (Holy 1989:281). Regardless of the eradication of cannibalism, which they are not ashamed to confess used to occur, Fijians maintained the *vilavilairevo* in their cultural repertoire as a highly regarded form of spectacle unique to the Sawau tribe of Beqa.

Another problem with Stymeist's conclusions is his underestimation of the baking process of the *Cordyline*. Drawing on Fulton's (1903:194, 201) supposition that Beqan "magicians" [*sic*] carried special stones that did not get very hot from island to island, Stymeist observes that the *masawe* ovens have "somewhat a lower surface temperature than ordinary lovos [*sic*] being constructed solely of *valu ndina* [*sic*] (a porous basalt) with poor conductivity and a slow rate of radiation" (Stymeist 1996:6).[65] On the contrary, an archaeological diagnostic exam of the earth oven employed for the cooking of the *Cordyline* in different parts of the Pacific shows a distinctive set of physical traits not found in other kinds of earth ovens: large oven size, large amount of combustible fuel, tremendous cooking temperature, prolonged cooking time, intense heat alteration of surrounding sediment, and extensive heat alteration of oven stones (Carson 2002:362–3). Heating stones are typically cobbles of volcanic stone (basalt). The heat from the initial wood fire is transferred into the stones and these continue to radiate heat within the oven throughout the period of cooking (Carson 2002:354).

Moreover, residue analysis of Māori earth ovens reveals an amino-acid profile different from that of fish or other animals and human flesh (Fankhauser 1993:15–16). Thus, it is plausible that the Māori, though also former cannibals, used *umu tī* for the sole purpose of baking *Cordyline*. Also, three kinds of leaves that assisted the process of digestion of human flesh were wrapped around dismembered victims and baked with on heated stones: *malawaci* (*Trophis anthropophagorum*), *tudauo* (*Omalanthus pedicellatus*), and

[64] Obeyesekere observes that "there is no reference to sacrificial anthropophagy in Tonga in Cook's time, but Polynesian ethnographers, including Williamson, note that it was introduced from Fiji in the early nineteenth century" (Obeyesekere 2005:85).

[65] He probably meant *vatu dina* (stone).

borodina (*Solanum anthropophagorum*) (Seemann 1973[1862]:176; Capell 1941). *Cordyline* leaves were not used for this purpose.[66] Furthermore, from the oral accounts collected in Beqa, it appears that the *lovo* used for *vilavilairevo* and the cooking of *Cordyline* were never used for any other food. These ovens were different from cannibal ovens, which had smaller cobbles like those used to cook *dalo* (taro).

Sahlins postulates that cannibalism exists *in nuce* in most sacrificial ceremonies (1983:88). Some agricultural people drew a link between death and rebirth in the cycle of fertilization and harvest. The notion that plants might need human sacrifice could have occurred in some societies. However, Fijian and Polynesian agrarian and horticultural rites consisted mostly of symbolic sacrifices, which are different from exo-cannibalism. In Tahiti, first fruits and ripening-of-the-year ceremonies were large-scale public ceremonies, mainly consisting of public offerings of food and other valuables to the communities' tutelary spirits and chiefs (Ellis 1853[1829]:218).

> Upon arrival at the *marae* all the objects brought along were placed inside its enclosing walls and the priests began the services, which consisted of thanksgivings and other long prayers. Then, the *tāu pure* [invocation prayer], the local sacrificer, placed upon the altar a small amount of the received fruits and other comestibles, as offerings to the gods, and designated the remainder for the host chief. (Moerenhout 1837:I, 519, quoted in Oliver 1974:261)

Similarly, in ancient Fiji, the accumulation of the first yams was occasion for a great feast. Relatives from other villages participated with their ancestral village groups. The yams were carried to the *bete* and formally presented to the chief, who in exchange presented *yaqona* and *tabua*.

It should first be noted that the gruesome details of Fijian cannibal feasts (e.g., Diapea (Jackson) 1928; Endicott 1923; Erskine 1987[1853]; Lockerby 1982[1925]) upon which Stymeist draws for his argument were not necessarily accurate first-hand accounts as claimed, but constructions of idealized anthropophagy rituals. For example, William Endicott, third mate on the *Glide*, later published a book titled *Wrecked Among Cannibals in the Fijis*. An appendix included the story "A Cannibal Feast in the Fiji Islands by an Eye-Witness," supposedly of having seen such a feast in March 1831. The story was also published in his home-town newspaper, *The Danvers Courier* on 16 August 1845. Sahlins argues that "A Cannibal Feast in the Fiji Islands by an Eye-Witness" was actually written by Endicott's shipmate Henry Fowler (also of Danvers), since an "F" is inscribed at the bottom of the newspaper

[66] Seemann visited Beqa on 5 September 1860 to collect *dilo* (*Colophillum inophillum*), an excellent remedy for rheumatism. Seemann describes well the *masawe* or *vasili toga* (*Cordyline*) as having a large root that "weighs from 10 to 14 lbs., and when baked, resembles in taste and degree of sweetness, as near as possible that of stick-liquorice. The Fijians chew it, or use it for sweetening puddings" (Seemann 1973[1862]:306).

article (Sahlins 2003:3).[67] Nowhere in Endicott's original log, conserved at the Peabody Essex Museum, is there "any reference to his having witnessed a cannibal feast" (Obeyesekere 2005:167). Obeyesekere (2005) believes that who actually wrote the cannibal feast story is not as important as that it was a typical fabrication of ritual, cannibalistic vengeance.

Several scholars have argued that the nineteenth century ethnographic imagination of cannibalism was a colonizing trope, a tool of the Empire to create a moral distance from the "other" (Arens 1979; Dixon 2001; Goldman 1999; Halvaksz 2006; Hulme 1998; Kilgour 2001; Lindenbaum 2004; Obeyesekere 1998, 2005,). [68] "Cannibal talks" are still one of the most important topics in cultural criticism today, for cannibalism pierces discussions of difference and identity, savagery and civilization, and the consequences of Orientalism (Kilgour 2001:vii; Lindenbaum 2004:476; Obeyesekere 2005:265).

A last problem emerging from Stymeist is his argument that sitting on the *lovo* emulates a former practice of placing the *bokola* (cannibal victims) in a sitting position and insulting and mutilating before cooking them (Stymeist 1996:8).[69] The supposed sitting posture of cannibal victims comes from a single reference in Peter Dillon's description of a cannibal feast he claims to have seen on 6 September 1813 in Bau (Dillon 1829:14–15; discussed in Clunie 2003[1977]:55; Davidson 1975:36; Obeyesekere 2005:199).[70]

[67] Similarly, Captain John Elphinstone Erskine's *Journal of a Cruise…in Her Majesty's Ship Havannah*, contains an appendix of the "Jackson Narrative," written by John Jackson, alias "Cannibal Jack" or William Diapea. Jackson wrote *Cannibal Jack: The True Autobiography of a White Man in the South Seas* in 1889 when he was seventy years old for a European reading public. Jackson/Diapea said that he had written an autobiography of the first twenty-six years of his life in nineteen copy books, but these have never been found. Obeyesekere (2005) points out that, unlike the Endicott case, we cannot prove that the accounts of cannibalism in *Cannibal Jack* are fabrications. However, it is significantly inconsistent with the earlier "Jackson Narrative" in Erskine's book. Obeyesekere concludes that the missing autobiography is also a fictional device.

[68] Representations of the savage "other" were enormously popular in Europe. Another example is the *Journal of William Lockerby: Sandalwood Trader in the Fijian Islands During the Years 1808–1809*, which contains a gruesome account of a cannibal feast (1925:44–45, 59–59). William Lockerby was a mate on the *Jenny*. His captain left him stranded in Vanua Levu, where he lived from May 1808 to June 1809 under the protection of the chief of Bua. Obeyesekere argues that, while there is no doubt that he was present in Vanua Levu, his account was not written in Fiji, but long after, and that he injected gruesome details into his narrative to please the reading public (Obeyesekere 2005:190–1).

[69] While some early accounts (Cowan 1910:372; Fulton 1903:191; Hocken 1898:671) report the firewalkers squatting down on top of the *lovo* at the end of their performance, it does not appear to be an essential element of the ritual and is completely absent in the *umu tī* ceremony.

[70] Peter Dillon was born in Martinique, the son of an Irish immigrant. A self-proclaimed explorer, raconteur, and discoverer of the fate of the La Pérouse expedition, he sailed to Fiji in 1813 as third mate on the *Hunter* under Captain James Robson to look for sandalwood.

> Fires were prepared and ovens heated for the reception of the bodies of our ill-fated companions, who, as well as the Bow [Bau] chiefs and their slaughtered men, were brought to the fires in the following manner. Two of the Vilear [Wailea] party placed a stick or limb of a tree on their shoulders, over which were thrown the body of their victims, with their legs hanging downwards on one side, and their heads on the other. They were thus carried in triumph to the ovens prepared to receive them. Here they were placed in a sitting posture while the savages sung and danced with joy over their prizes, and fired several musket-balls through each of the corpses, all the muskets of the slain having fallen into their hands. No sooner was this ceremony over than the priests began to cut and dissect those unfortunate men in our presence. Their flesh was immediately placed in the ovens to be baked and prepared as a repast for the victors. (Dillon 1829:14–15)

No other accounts from seamen, traders, or travelers (e.g., Eagleston 1833–1836; Oliver 1846; Patterson 1982[1925]; Wallis-Davis 1983[1851]; Wilkes 1945[1845]), or missionaires (e.g., Cargill 1839; Hunt 1839–1848; Jaggar 1988[1838–1845]; Waterhouse 1997[1866]; Watsford 1900; Williams 1982[1858]) include a description of *bokola* placed in such a position inside the *lovo*. Obeyesekere believes that Dillon, who was holed up during a battle, was unlikely to have seen such activities, and probably invented the scene to present himself as a hero in the midst of savages (Obeyesekere 2005:198–9).[71]

Neither Witchcraft nor Sorcery

While spirits are a vague force, ancestral gods, in Fiji and in Beqa, are conceived of as "beings," with peculiar somatic and even lexical characteristics (see Levy, Mageo, and Howard 1996:15). From the oral accounts I collected juxtaposed with those collected in the late 1970s by Bigay, Rajotte, and Tubanavau, it emerges that all of the *kalou vu* (ancestral gods) of Beqa are traceable to actual men who once lived, usually important chiefs who exercised great *sau* (power), maintain their own social hierarchy, inhabit a humanlike world of social relations, and are believed to be much concerned with the affairs of the living (Bigay, pers. comm.; Bigay et. al. 1981:131; Tubanavau, pers. comm.; Tuwere 2002:54).

[71] An analysis of Dillon's description of the battle also reveals invented names and inconsistences such as the number of dead Europeans (Obeyesekere 2005:220). Dillon's graphic account was nevertheless used in Maynard and Dumas' *The Whalers* (Hutchinson 1937). Maynard was the surgeon of a French whaling ship in New Zealand around 1838. Several of his works about his adventures were edited by his friend Alexandre Dumas (Père), including *Les Baleiniers* (1861, translated in 1937 as *The Whalers*). Dillon's adventures appeared also in George Bayly's *Sea Life Sixty Years Ago* (1885), a collection of sentimental reminiscences based on his unpublished *Journal of Voyages*.

Tui Namoliwai is nicknamed the "god of firewalking," head of the tribe of *veli* inhabiting the Namoliwai region, more often simply referred to as *gone* (literally "children"). They are described as being shorter than men, and having dark skin, a square-built physique, long thick hair, and a particular idiosyncratic distaste for coconuts; lastly, according to Seemann, "they sing sweetly and occasionally gratify the Fijians with a song" (Seemann 1973[1862]:204).

While in the previous section I disproved any past association between *vilavilairevo* and cannibalism, in this section I attempt to argue the groundlessness of any connection between *vilavilairevo* and witchcraft. Levy, Mageo, and Howard observe that:

> Gods can be manipulated through interpersonal moral techniques such as praise, supplication and gift giving—just as high status humans can be. Spirits are vague forces… They exist at the margins of the human order in a dreamlike world of shifting categories, vague motivations, and amorphous relations with other beings. Spirits are either avoided or manipulated through devices of direct "magical" power. The relation between gods and spirits is representative of the relations between the center and the margins of the social order and has much to say about these relations… Since Christianity does not provide a well-defined frame for experiencing spirits, it collapses them into a Christian [undifferentiated] demonic realm which is much vaguer than spirits' traditional classification. So when old religions go (and with them former gods), spirits become even more unbounded, chaotic and shadowy… (Levy, Mageo, and Howard 1996:15)

Beqan gods, being more "personlike," are related to people's conscience and personhood. They are central to the process of representing and sanctioning the community's moral order through socially adequate rewards and punishments. In a different way, spirits (*niju*) are associated with people's bodies, and the fluidity of bodily boundaries allows spirits and spiritual manifestations to enter and occupy the body. Becker (1995:105) observes that the "body's space is exploited as a forum to critique moral behavior in the community." Gods and spirits co-exist, but the former can be used to control and protect against the latter and their negative influences (Levy, Mageo, and Howard 1996:16, 21; see also Becker 1995; Katz 1993).

The array of names used in Beqa to describe the little gods of firewalking, *veli* (fairies, gnomes, goblins), *gone* (children), and rarely *manumanu* (little non-human, animal-like beings), indicates that besides the name and title of their chiefly ancestor, Tui Namoliwai, there is not a univocal term to describe them. They are not spirits, witches, "supernatural entities" in their classic connotation; they always appear as male, living in a parallel humanlike world, with a parallel structure: village, chief, rules, dietary and social habits. Besides their notorious naivete, and occasional spitefulness and elusiveness, there are no accounts of them being called to aid in the workings of magic, or witchcraft

like benign of malevolent demons, or exercising possession behavior on predisposed selves, or needing to be exorcized. Evocative of analogous traits is Brewster's vivid description of the *veli* populating Viti Levu's highlands:

> The natives of my time [1840–1910] used to maintain that the forest, and the waste spaces were still inhabited by a dwarf or pigmy people, visible only to the faithful, handsome little folk with large fuzzy mops of hair, miniatures of what their own were like until they were cropped in deference to the sanitary requirements of the Wesleyan missionaries. These little sylvan creatures were called *Veli* and took the place of our own fairies. They loved the woods, the open grasslands and the sparkling brooks, and dwelt in hollow trees, caves and dugouts. They had their own bananas, *kava* and other wild plants from which the varieties now in cultivation have been evolved. There is a beautiful fern called *Iri ni Veli*, the fan of the fairies, so called from its resemblance to the fronds of the magnificent *Prichardia Pacifica* [*sic*], from which are made the *viu* or palm fans, one of the insignia of chiefly rank. (Brewster 1967[1922]:88)

Far from proposing a treatise on fauns, fairies, gnomes, and goblins, several elements confirm a similarity of traits between the *veli* from Viti Levu's mountainous region and those inhabiting the upper Namoliwai river region in Beqa: the predilection for natural streams of water, tree ferns, and sweet fruits. Brewster suggests that the *veli* are "akin" to the *luveniwai* (literally "children of the water"), the miniature men with large heads of hair populating the woodlands of Colo East. However, debunking a popular credence that the *luveniwai*—denounced and suppressed by the missionaries—were malignant creatures, Brewster argues instead that the people he talked to used to meet these little creatures in the woods, for they claimed they were their *daunivucu* (experts in poetry) who taught them songs and dances (Brewster 1967[1922]:223; Deane 1921:33; Quain 1948:238).

The missionaries looked at the *luveniwai* as pertaining to a complex combination of spirit possession, sorcery, and tribal cult, which seemed to have been an ancient and widespread practice in many parts of Fiji. The *luveniwai* were believed to be worshipped and enter a person's body and give him special powers. Once achieved, they were capable of superhuman acts of divination and courage (Deane 1921; Hocart 1929;[72] Kaplan 1989; Williams 1982[1858]). The *luveniwai* historically have been associated with a ritual conducted by the *vuniduvu*, in which a group of youth under his leadership gathered in a *bure* (*bolabola*) "drumming bamboos to lure inland the wild gods of the sea to make themselves invulnerable" (Kaplan 1989; de Marzan 1972a [ca.1891–1925]:16). They have also been associated with a kind of "secret society," or a "cult," used by someone who wished to kill

[72] Hocart refers to them as "elves" and argues that they do not live inland but on the shore; they are worshipped only on shores near a nice beach (Hocart 1929:202).

somebody, through a formal petition—accompanied by a libation of *yaqona*—to the *luveniwai* spirit to hit the *yalo* (soul) of the victim (see Deane 1921:34; de Marzan 1908:727; de Marzan 1972a [ca. 1891–1925]:12; Rougier 1972 [ca. 1891–1925]:II; Spencer 1941:17). According to Spencer, the *luveniwai* actually have "no connection with water" for their cult probably originated in the mountain range of Nakauvadra in Northeastern Fiji (Spencer 1941.). Kaplan observes that in Fijian *wai* (water) also means "medicine" (Kaplan 1989:366; see also de Marzan 1972a [ca. 1891–1925]:12; Quain 1948:241); she therefore alternatively names them "spirits of remedy" (Kaplan 1995a:50).

I would be careful not to jump to sudden conclusions based on simple analogy about a relationship between the *veli* and *luveniwai*. Stymeist misinterprets Brewster (1967[1922]:222) and repeats Roth's solecism (Roth 1933:48), concluding that Tui Namoliwai "is apparently one of these creatures…*luveniawai* [*sic*]" and that *vilavilairevo* is "cognate with certain other rites and ritual performances, kalou rere or Luve Ni Wai [*sic*]" (Stymeist 1996:5, 9). From Quain's narration of his encounter with the son of a shaman in Nakoroka in the 1940s, it appears instead that *veli* and *luveniwai* are not the same thing (Quain 1948:238).[73] I draw the same conclusion from a series of assumptions.

Both *veli* and *luveniwai*—like most spirits, divinities, fauns, gnomes, fairies, and goblins—tend to interfere with the lives of humans, sometime benignly promoting their interests, sometime being rancorous and malevolent. Both also endure the discursive Fijian term of endearment "children" (*gone*, *luve*), plausibly because all these creatures are believed to be "smaller" than men. Both of them could be a medium to rituals of invulnerability, although there are several rituals in Fiji believed to bring invulnerability. In his account of "Fiji's secret societies," de Marzan distinguishes several phenomena, but never mentions the *veli* or the *vilavilairevo* in Beqa.[74]

[73] The son of the shaman tells Quain that he learned "to cure several sicknesses and to deal with many kinds of spirits, the *veli* and the *uwawa* who teach the modern sitting dance, bring luck at cards, and assist a thief who wishes to steal from the Indians or a store. He also dealt extensively with the Children-of-Water [*luveniwai*]. These [the *luveniwai*] are useful in all manner of trickery; they rank just below true ancestors and are sometime addressed as such" (Quain 1948:238).

[74] Jean de Marzan, a Marist Father who served in Fiji from 1893 to 1927 left an invaluable account of Fijian customs and beliefs in forty-three letters and several descriptive papers published in the German-based ethnographic periodical *Anthropos* between 1907 and 1913, and translated by Thomas in 1987 for *Domodomo*. An earlier manuscript version exists in the Archives of the Oceania Marist Province Archives in Suva. The manuscripts are contained in a small exercise book marked as PMB 463. A largely faithful typescript copy is among "Quelques Notes sur Fiji, les Fijiens et la Religion Catholique a Fiji" marked as PMB 439. The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (PMB) at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University in Canberra, Australia is a non-profit organization established

Notably, Gordon-Cumming distinguishes the *veli* from other fairy creatures, specifying that her list "contains more than fifty of their names, but I believe is incomplete" (Gordon-Cumming 1901[1881]:143). She describes them as tiny men (*Vélé*) inhabiting the great *dakua* (*Coniferae*) or *kaurie* (pine forests) with high conical heads, carrying small hand-clubs which they throw at all trespassers. Interestingly, she observes that "if you have the wit to carry in your hand a fern-leaf, they are powerless, and fall at your feet, crying 'Spare me' " (Gordon-Cumming, ibid.), a character trait analogous to the Beqa-Namoliwai *veli*'s predilection for the *balabala* (tree fern, *Cyathea lunulata*).

Building on Kaplan, what I disagree with is the way boundaries have been drawn around all these phenomena, how they have been reified, conflated, and labeled. If we look at the example of the copiously documented western folkloristic tradition (see Rose 1996), we understand how impractical it is to try to establish a taxonomy among families of fauns, fairies, gnomes, elves, deities, and worshipping rituals claiming intrinsic similarities among their alleged demonic habitus. Or, from a Christian theological point of view, it is unrewarding to indiscriminately place on all these phenomena the stamp of *tevoro* (devil). Analogies exist, or better resist, because they are the result of colonial and religious authorities' successful efforts to conceive and label the *luveniwai* as belonging to marginal, dubious, deviant activity and revivals of heathen and irrational cults. Kaplan argues in fact that there are many parallels in other colonial societies (Kaplan 1988, 1989, 1995a).[75] Kaplan's lead suggests that instead of finding a label for antiquities and expressions of folklore, establishing analogies and processualizing culture, we should analyze how the rise of a hegemonic state, or an institution such as the church, routinizes, marginalizes, criminalizes, and charges as deviant all that does not fit its ordering categories (Kaplan 1995a; Merry 2000).

Vilavilairevo was never part of the early 1900s colonial officials' "*tuka* witch hunt," which condemned the *luveniwai* (defined as "intercourse with the water spirits," in Kaplan 1995a:68)[76] and the *kalou rere* (defined as "intercourse with

in 1968 to identify and preserve microfilm copies of archives, manuscripts, and rare printed documents relating to the South Pacific Islands.

[75] Examples include the British colonial imagination of millenarianism in colonial Malawi and Zambia from 1900 to 1925 (Kaplan 1995a); sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish men making Peruvian-Andean women into witches in an intertwined process of Catholic inquisition and the imposition of colonial state control (Silverblatt quoted in Kaplan 1989: 349); the "invention" of witchcraft through inquisition in the Italian Friuli region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when agrarian fertility rites were turned into satanic inversions of Catholic practice in the church's imagination (Ginzburg 1983, quoted in Kaplan 1989).

[76] The *Tuka* Movement was defined "a return of heathenism with all its attendant practices (of which cannibalism is an essential feature)" (Native Commissioner Russell 14/6625, quoted in Kaplan 1988:143, 1995:68–69). The *Tuka* Movement came into existence towards the end of the late 1870s through the inspiration of an oracle priest from the hill country of Viti Levu

the spirits of the forest," in Kaplan, ibid.), heralding these practices as "penal by Native Regulation" (Native Commissioner Russell quoted in Kaplan, ibid.), and making them offences punished with flagellation (Thomson 1968[1908]:171). Apart from empirical generalizations, different from the *luveniwai* and other blurred phenomena, the immunity to walk on hot stones in Beqa probably resisted up until today because it was never a ritual associated with war, cannibalism, or other heathen practices progressively surveilled, criminalized, and demolished by the colonial administration and the missionaries.

Neither Methodist nor Catholic missionary accounts about the Beqan people show any hint of conceptualizing or associating the *vilavilairevo* ceremony with demonic categories or activities (Reverend Cargill in Fiji from 1835–1840;[77] Reverend Thomas Jaggar in Fiji from 1838–1848;[78] Reverend Calvert in Fiji from 1838–1864 and in 1886;[79] and Reverend Waterhouse in Fiji from 1850–1857, 1859–1864, and 1874–1878; [80] de Marzan in Fiji from 1893–1927; [81] Rougier in Fiji from 1888 until an unknown date[82]). The

named Ndugomoi. Fearing the influence of Christian missionaries in Fiji, Ndugomoi renamed himself Navosavakandua ("he who speaks once") and proclaimed himself the supreme judge of all things who has power over life and death. He incurred the hostility of the European authorities by proclaiming the imminent return of the indigenous peoples and ancestors and the concomitant demise of the white settlers. He made miracles and granted immortality (*tuka*) to his followers. The colonial authorities found the *Tuka* movement heathen and criminal. Navosavakandua was arrested in 1885 and sentenced to six months hard labor and exile. In spite of the arrest of its leader, the movement continued to spread before entering into decline (see Kaplan 1988, 1989, 1990, 1995).

[77] Reverend David Cargill arrived at Lakeba, Fiji on 12 October 1835.

[78] Reverend Thomas Jaggar arrived at Lakeba, Fiji on 22 December 1839

[79] Reverend Calvert arrived at Lakeba, Fiji on 22 December 1838.

[80] Reverend Joseph Waterhouse volunteered as a missionary to Fiji in 1849 where he worked from 1850–57. He went back to Fiji in 1859 as chairman of the district. Forced by ill health to leave Fiji in 1864, next year he was appointed to New Norfolk and served in Tasmania until 1870 when he moved to Victoria, ministering at Beechworth and Ballarat. In 1874, after its annexation to Britain, he returned to Fiji at the request of the Sydney Conference and took charge of the Training Institution at Navuloa until 1878 when he returned to Australia. He was drowned in the wreck of the *Tararua* off Dunedin on 29 April 1881 after visiting New Zealand (Australian Dictionary of Biography, online edition, accessed 1 July 2006). Garrett (1982) and Ravuvu (1987) assert that he arrived in Fiji in 1853.

[81] Jean de Marzan was a Marist Father (Society of Mary), a Roman Catholic religious congregation or order, founded in France in 1816 and approved by the Vatican in 1836. Their first mission outside France was the Vicariate Apostolic of western Oceania. The order arrived in Fiji in 1844.

[82] Father Emmanuel Rougier is a most interesting figure in South Pacific history. Ordained abbot in 1888, he left for Fiji where he became very active. "*Ratou* [sic] *ko Manuele na bete kalou*" (chief Manuel priest of God), as he wrote about himself in a letter to his parents (quoted in Boulagnon 2002:36), he soon became very independent from the hierarchy of the Marist Church. In a mysterious way he inherited from a New Caledonian convict a colossal fortune,

Wesleyan Missionary Notices abound with notices and letters from the field denouncing heathenisms and dangerous beliefs, as in a report from 9 January 1860, when Reverend Wilson exorcized an old man in Bua who claimed that his god was a shark (Wilson 1860a:170). However, as I have said, *vilavilairevo* is never mentioned.

The earliest missionary account about *vilavilairevo* comes from Reverend Joseph Waterhouse—son of Reverend John Waterhouse—who was appointed general superintendent of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in Australia and Polynesia. Joseph Waterhouse is particularly remembered and credited for the conversion of Cakobau and for his opposition to the Cession to Britain, putting pressure on Colonel W. J. Smythe during his tour of the islands in 1859. In his book *The King and People of Fiji*, Waterhouse makes clear that "the sorcerers are a class distinct from the priests [*bete*]. When application is made to effect the discovery of thieves, the sorcerer binds the soul of the suspected, throws them into his oven and bakes them" (Waterhouse 1997[1866]:297). Of the *Vu-i-Beqa* (ancestral god of Beqa), and the *vilavilairevo* Waterhouse writes in lenient terms:

> Vu-i-Beqa (Origin-of-the-island-of-Beqa) [*sic*] is a god of extensive renown and worship. He assumed various shrines. Once, when travelling under the appearance of an eel or serpent, he was discovered by a man, who determined to catch the eel for his dinner. But the creature concealed itself. The man dug and dug, until he came to a fence.
>
> "Fence yourself as you like," said he, "you shall be mine."
>
> As he was about to secure his prize, the god expressed a wish to bargain for release.
>
> "What will you give?" was the inquiry.
>
> "Women," said the god.
>
> "No," rejoined the man.
>
> "Then food without the trouble of planting it."
>
> "No."
>
> At last the god promised him power over fire and besmeared the man's body with its froth, imparting thereby the necessary power over the fiery element. Thus, the Beqa people make large fires and walk about in the midst of the burning element uninjured, when others cannot approach near the flames. Since they have embraced Christianity

which he used to purchase the islands of Fanning and Washington, subsequently sold in 1907 to buy the isle of Kiritimati (Christmas Island) where he built roads and villages and planted 800,000 coconuts, becoming a quasi-king. When he was excommunicated by the Marist order, he was controlling the alcohol cartel from the Pacific to North America. Retired in Tahiti, where he died in 1932, he became an important figure of its political and economic colonial milieu (Boulagnon 2002).

> they have revealed the secret of their performance. In former times the natives thought the Beqa people equal to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. (Waterhouse 1997[1866]:284–5)

The primary aim of religious rituals in traditional Oceania is apotropaic: the channeling of the influence of gods into areas of life where it would be useful and "away" from those areas where it might me harmful. The *vilavilairevo* ceremony was originally a rite of increase, a thanksgiving ceremony (*na ka ga ni vakavinavinaka*) free of any malevolent intent. An essential element of witchcraft is pouring out a libation of *yaqona* to the ancestors (Kasuga 1994; Katz 1993; Tomlinson 2009). Neither the *madrali* nor the employment of the *waqabalabala* and *draunibalabala* in the performance involve the presentation or consumption of *yaqona* or *vakadraunikau* (literally "practicing sorcery with leaves"), *vakacuru* (willing possession), or *vakatevoro* (unwilling possession). However, a complete erosion of the *madrali*, which I have commented on elsewhere (Pigliasco 2005, 2007, forthcoming), occurred only recently in consequence of the *veivakasavasavataki*, a three month long daily process of religious cleansing that took place between 1 October 2002 and 1 January 2003 in the village of Dakuibeqa on Beqa Island.[83]

Conclusion

This study shows that the *vilavilairevo* ceremony has multiple meanings. Drawing on Arno's (2003:816) elegant argument that there is an "ethnological chiasmus" between Hawaiian and Fijian practices, I suggest that Beqan and Huahine-Raiatean modes of representation are parallel but not identical. Huahine-Ra'iātea, having lost the practice, has preserved in Raiatean descendents' memories a verbal account of the use of the *umu tī*, while Beqa has preserved the practice but lost the verbal explanations. As a blurred genre, *vilavilairevo* has survived even though participants are unable to furnish verbal explanations of its symbolic meaning. Ritual meanings may be unverbalized because they surpass and confound language. In his reconstruction of the meaning of the *dranukilikili* funerary ritual in Fiji, Arno argues that "ritual acts that seem most natural and obvious to participants—so natural that they cannot and need not be reduced to verbal formulation—may have reference to cultural dimensions of social experience that can be investigated ethnographically" (Arno 2003:810).

Paraphrasing Wittgenstein, Arno (2003:815) suggests not asking about the meaning of the act, but asking how it is used. The gift brought back by Tuiqalita to the storyteller is not a *nabu* (a material present), but an *isolisoli* (gift,

[83] Methodist officials in Suva prefer to use the expression *veivakavoui vakayalo kei na vevakaduavatataki* (spiritual renewal and reconciliation).

grant, permit). It may be interpreted as an endowment or a natural talent. The gift of firewalking, a rite of increase in the past and a source of revenue in the present, becomes an *iloloma* (token of love), suggesting (*veilomani*) collective care and respect (*veidokai*). It establishes a synallagmatic relation between the cognition of endowment and that of custodianship among the Naivilaqata priestly clan and by extension the Sawau *yavusa*.

Gifts engender obligations to reciprocate. In other words, the gift interaction requires the giver's ability to recognize needs of others and to produce or fashion something to satisfy them (Vaughan 2002:96). Having spared the life of the *veli*'s chief (Tui Namoliwai), which represented his homage (*nabu*) to the storyteller, Tuiqalita accepts the gift (*isolisoli*) of *vilavilairevo*. In the logic of the myth, it is a gift of nourishment, a technological activity that Tui Namoliwai gives to Tuiqalita in exchange for his life; an inexhaustible shared source of wealth and prestige that in the past helped increase the reserve supply of starch and sugar, and more recently, with the advent of tourism, has become a source of financial income.

Turner (1984) observes that the *isevu*, the annual first fruit ceremony consisting of a ritual offering of the newly harvested yams (*Dioscorea alata*) is a ritual of increase, an appeal for health, well-being for the community and prosperity. In Hocart's words it is "a cooperation for life" (1936:37; also quoted in Turner 1984:139). First fruit offerings to the gods were regular ritual practices in Fiji.[84] Turner writes that "never in living memory has the *isevu* failed to be held" (Turner, ibid.). Reverend Williams observes that:

> The worship of the gods of Fiji is not a regular and constant service, but merely suggested by circumstances, or dictated by emergency or fear. There are, however, certain superstitious ceremonies which are duly observed; such as the [*i*]*sevu*—presenting the first fruits of yams; [*i*]*tadravu*—an offering made at the close of the year. (Williams: 1982[1858]:230–1)[85]

In Beqa, the belief as well as the fear that the next harvest might be lean if the *isevu* is not offered to the chief and the *lotu* is still prevalent (Tuwere 2002:60). In fact, the *isevu ni kalou* (to the ancestral god) is accommodated very well within the Christian tradition. However, the *vilavilairevo* traditionally is

[84] Traditionally, the day of the first-fruit offering was selected by the village priest (Sahlins 1962:344). "Like many Fijian rituals, the first fruit ceremony lasts four days; for the elders of the *itaukei* it amounts to a four day vigil. Within the *isevu* there are three stages: *na isevu ni kalou*, or '*isevu* of the ancestral spirit', involves the eating of yams by men of those *mataqali* designated as *itaukei*. The second stage, *na isevu ni vanua*, or '*isevu* of the land' involves the presentation of yams to the chief. The third stage, *na isevu ni koile*, involves women's presentation of *koile*, a type of wild yam, to the men gathered in the place of vigil" (Turner 1984:137).

[85] *Itadravu* is an offering made to the *kalou* when the yams are all planted and there is only a little food left. It is the last offering the *kalou* will receive that year.

not associated with the *isevu*. The *vilavilairevo* is more than an *isevu* (first fruit ceremony) (Crosby 1988a:58; Thomson 1894:196) or a *solevu* (ceremonial exchange) (Crosby 1988a:58; Ravuvu 1983:49). The answers I collected about the firewalking ceremony in Beqa, compared to the archival records of firewalking in Oceania, lead me to suspect that it arose independently of the pan-Fijian yam harvest ceremonies held every February. It seems more local and transitional than the calendrical customs typical of rites of increase. *Vilavilairevo,* 'jumping into the earth oven', describes a ceremony complementary to the ritual baking of *Cordyline* rhizomes in the oven.

The *vilavilairevo* has the character of a first-fruit ceremony, but is not a typical *isevu*. Neither the myth nor a diachronic analysis of the *vilavilairevo* suggests it was an *isevu*. There is no suggestion that the rite was seasonal. Accounts collected in Beqa confirm that the yam harvest and ceremonial offerings are traditionally held in February (*Vula ni sevu*), but there is no specific season for harvesting *Cordyline*. *Cordyline* is harvested according to a preference for younger or older plants, which have different flavors (Carson 2002; Fankhauser 1986:16–17).[86] I argue that the fact that *Cordyline* was available year-round means that cooking its rhizomes, as acted out in *vilavilairevo*, was related to issues of scarcity and unpredictable environmental conditions. It represented the islanders' survival even if there was not a good yam harvest.

The *vilavilairevo* ceremony witnessed by the Vice-Regal party in 1892 in Rukua village was held in September, not February (Thomson 1894:195).[87] In Lindt's (1893) account, Jonacani Dabea had been contacted in August 1892 by Governor Thurston to hold the ceremony, for which the village would be recompensed. Dabea explained why they could not have the ceremony immediately:

> The present unusually wet season had delayed the yam planting [*Vula icukicuki*—August] and the Beqa folks were still engaged at this important work; moreover that it would take several weeks' time to cut the necessary quantity of fuel. (Dabea quoted in Lindt 1893:51)

While the yam harvest had been lean, there was a large quantity of *masawe* on hand:

> Bundles of *masawe* root were hurled into the pit, and in a few seconds the floor of the oven was completely covered with them… The excitement now became general, more green leaves and reeds were brought and thrown in, and then the earth round the rim of the pit was dug up and the excavation covered with it in order to keep the heat required to roast the roots. (Lindt 1893:52)

[86] Reverend Williams observes that "*masawe* (*Dracæna terminalis*)—the tī-tree—costs little care" (1982[1858]:62).

[87] Present were the Governor and Lady Thurston, the Chief Medical Officer of the Colony Bolton Glanvil Corney and his wife, Thomson (1894), and Lindt (1893).

Thomson, who also attended, as previously commented, described the ceremony in greater detail, including the reason for holding it at the Europeans' behest:

> Once every year, the *masawe*, a dracaena [*Cordyline*] that grows in profusion on the grassy hillside of the island, becomes fit to yield the sugar of which its fibrous root is full. To render it fit to eat the roots must be baked among hot stones for four days. A great pit is dug, and filled with large stones and blazing logs, and when these have burned down and the stones are at white heat, the oven is ready for the *masawe*. It is at this stage that the clan Na Ivilankata [Naivilaqata], favoured of the gods, is called to 'leap into the oven' (*rikata na lovo*), and walk unharmed upon the hot stones that would scorch and wither the feet of any but the descendants of the dauntless Tui Nkualita [Tuiqalita]. Twice only had the Europeans been fortunate enough to see the *masawe* cooked, and so marvelous had been the tales they told, and so cynical the skepticism with which they had been received, that nothing short of another performance before witnesses and the photographic camera would have satisfied the average 'old hand'… [At the end of the ceremony] baskets of the dracaena root are flung to them, more leaves and then the bystanders and every one joins in shovelling earth over all till the pit is gone, and a smoking mound of fresh earth takes its place. This will keep hot for four days, and then the *masawe* will be cooked. (Thomson 1894:195, 204)

I argue that, as in Moala where it was customary to have first-fruit offerings of *dawa* (Oceanic lychee or *Pometia pinnata*), *uto* (breadfruit), and *dalo* (taro) followed by a feast (Sahlins 1962:345–6), in Beqa the *vilavilairevo* was staged whenever they had a large quantity of *masawe* to be baked (*Na Mata* 1885:2; Toganivalu, translated by Beauclerc 1914:2). Practical activities, such as food preparation, can become ritualized and distilled over time into a regime of social authority (see Dunnell 1999). Tambiah (1979) and Schechner (1994) observe that all rituals are performative because they are acts done, and all performances are ritualized because they are codified and repeated. Tambiah notes that some performative ritual acts are regulative in that they orient and regulate a practical or technical activity while also addressing the aesthetic style of that activity (e.g., rice cultivation, canoe-making). Arguably, the ceremonial cooking of the cordyline rhizomes, originally but no longer part of the ritual process of Fijian firewalking, evolved in Beqan society as a regulative practice. As a ceremonial performance, it regulated the practical activity of the harvesting and cooking of the *Cordyline* plants, and in the process it organized labor, encoded aesthetic values and mythical associations, and provided sustenance. The ritual anticipated the success of the next *Cordyline* harvest, addressing anxieties of famine and crisis, intensifying the solidarity of the group, constructing collective hope and optimism (Miyazaki 2004).

"Spectacular" public performances reintegrate the whole community (Da Matta 1981; Handelman 1990). Building on Geertz (1973), Bell argues that ritual dramatizes, enacts, materializes, or performs a system of symbols, suggesting that activity is a secondary, physical manifestation or expression of thought. Furthermore, by enacting a symbolic system, ritual integrates two irreducible aspects of symbols: worldview and ethos. In other words, ritual is to the symbols it dramatizes as action is to thought (Bell 1992:31–32).

Until very recently, every time *masawe* were cooked, the *bete* of the Naivilaqata clan offered a small but symbolically important portion of the *qalu* pudding to the *veli*. These offerings were a necessary condition for the desacralization of the new harvest, which only then could be put to the "profane use" of human consumption (Henninger 1987:548). These offerings are acts of thanksgiving for the food harvested. They are symbolic homage to the supreme being to whom everything belongs and who therefore cannot be enriched (Schmidt, quoted in Henninger, ibid.). The fact that mythical tradition states that the *masawe* should be baked for four days, which is the time it actually takes for its sugar content to become edible, is a sufficient sociological reason for the act; the meaning of the rite constitutes its own goal (Staal 1989:131).[88] Moreover, while the *masawe*, essential to the original ritual, are no longer part of it, the subsistence dimension of the practice has turned into a "virtual" product—the touristic allure. The tourist context allows the Sawau like other Pacific Island artists to perform a transmutation of wealth through ritual, and also exercise novel forms of power and artistic expression.

Oral accounts, nonverbal referential meanings (i.e., stone size), and the analysis of an identical ceremony (*umu tī*) with the same syntactic structure, enable me to dismiss theories evoking symbolic referents between the *vilavilairevo* and cannibalism. It might, however, be possible to empirically demonstrate that other symbolic values are enacted in the ceremony. The unequivocal spectacular element of physical danger of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony may recall to some observers masculine tropes of *mana* (supernatural power) and bravado, or a manifestation of superiority to natural calamity, to be demonstrated especially when food reserves were limited. In this interpretation, walking on hot stones and consuming *Cordyline* rhizomes constitute an ancestral Polynesian cultural elaboration adopted in response to subsistence's exigencies in a resource poor and unpredictable island environment. For others, the ceremony has no symbolic value; it is entertainment for the chief, a means of collective empowerment, or just custom (Sahlins 1983:89).

[88] "The physical properties of *tī* roots necessitate the unusually high temperature of *umu tī*. *Tī* roots contain a branched structure of fructan with a high degree of polymerisation (Meier and Reid 1982:449) and only an intense and prolonged heat can depolymerise and hydrolise the material effectively (Wandsnider 1997:3, 23)." (Carson 2002:348)

Scholars should not forget that the various cultural forms and practices encountered in the present are also products of modern social, political, and cultural processes (Lindenbaum 2004:482). Cultures may come from the past, but they are also made and remade in the present. Finney observes that this is as much an age of cultural revival as it is of globalization, particularly in the Pacific where indigenous peoples are still under foreign rule or have only recently escaped from it to find that the outside world and its influences are still pressing heavily on them (see Finney 1999, 2003). The Fijian *vilavilairevo* ceremony shows that maintaining or reviving traditional cultural expression is a way of staging cultural identity in the face of lingering colonial structures and increasing pressures of globalization.

Figure 4. *24 May 2005*
Firewalkers from Naceva village in Beqa cross the fire pit during a *vilavilairevo* at the luxury Royal Davui Resort on the neighbor island of Ugaga. Photo by the author.

CHAPTER 2

"ARE THEY EVIL?": DENOMINATIONAL COMPETITION AND CULTURAL DEMONIZATION ON A FIJIAN ISLAND

> [Ratu Jo and Ratu Cadri] were telling stories of *veli*, the invisible dwarf spirits. If a large boat is ashore and people want it to be dragged to the sea, the *bete* [traditional priest] who serves the *veli* can do so single-handedly because he is aided by all his invisible dwarfish helpers. The *veli* also protect the Beqa firewalkers by lying (invisibly) on the hot stones… If you're building a[n] *irevo* [earth oven], don't joke about firewalking across it, or the *veli* will hear you, lie on the hot stones, and consequently your food will not get cooked. But if you've made this joke and want to negate the effects, toss a coconut in the earth oven, for the coconut is the *veli*'s food. It's clear that Rt Jo and Rt Cadri firmly believe in their existence and think of them as adorable benevolent spirits.
>
> — Matt Tomlinson (2006: 41–42)[1]

Introduction

In February 2005, while chatting with me about the *veli*—the fairy creatures populating Fijian oral histories—of the Fijian firewalking ceremony (*vilavilairevo*), Epeli Hau'ofa blurted out: "Are they *evil*? Why are they considered *tevoro* [devils]? Christianity has been indigenized," he continued "and Beqan people might have been forced to realign their beliefs to the Christian religion, but the beliefs are still there!"[2] His bold statement immediately reminded me of Rusiate Nayacakalou's (1975:92) observation that "there are still clear traces of belief in the supernatural beings once held to influence the affairs of the men." We were talking at the Oceania Centre

[1] Unpublished (Notebook E1, 23 January), in author's possession.

[2] Epeli Hau'ofa (1939–2009) was one of the Pacific's most influential leaders in the academic and creative arena. A Fiji Islander writer and anthropologist, Hau'ofa was born of Tongan missionary parents working in Papua New Guinea. At one time the head of the Department of Sociology at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, in 1997 he became the founder and director of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture at the University of the South Pacific.

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for Arts and Culture at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, and before I left, Hau'ofa showed me an impressive carving by the Centre's artist Paula Liga, who had used a 15 foot *vaivai* (acacia) tree cut down for a road extension near Suva's cemetery. The carving had been recently unveiled to the public. "It is like this carving," Hau'ofa said, "you *cannot* take the images of myths and legends it incorporates out of it." This echoes something he had written a few years before: "to deny the relevance of tradition in our lives is to repudiate our sources of knowledge, our cultures, our very selves. It is a prescription for getting lost at sea" (Hau'ofa 1993:130).

During my residence in Suva, Hau'ofa and I met other times to talk about the rhetorics and rituals of cultural cleansing imposed by the Methodist and Pentecostal Churches in Beqa, an island iconic in Fiji for the practice of *vilavilairevo*. The reproduction of tradition on Beqa is currently being shaped by social processes such as conversion and commoditization. The *vilavilairevo* (literally 'jumping into the earth oven') is a dramatic ceremony traditionally performed only by members of the Naivilaqata clan of the Sawau people on the island of Beqa, and is a prime example of a propitiation ritual that has become commodified to suit the requirements of tourism (Pigliasco 2007, 2009a, 2010, forthcoming). Elsewhere (Pigliasco 2007, 2009b, 2010; Pigliasco and Lipp 2011), I have observed that despite the changed context, the Sawau performers of *vilavilairevo* perceive an astonishing degree of continuity between the old and the new situation. While the *masawe* (cordyline rhizomes: *Cordyline fruticosa* and *C. terminalis*) essential to the original ritual, and its offering to the *veli* (*madrali*) are no longer part of it, the practice's touristic allure and consequent value as a product have become its subsistence dimension. The tourist context allows the Sawau, like other Pacific Island artists, to perform a transmutation of wealth through ritual, and also to exercise novel forms of power and artistic expression.

Hau'ofa was particularly interested in the *veivakasavasavataki*, a three month long process of cleansing operated by the Methodist Church that took place between 1 October 2002 and 1 January 2003 in Dakuibeqa, which I had quite accidentally run into while visiting there, and an ongoing village factionalism created by two Pentecostal Churches in the nearby village of Rukua where my consultant and collaborator Mika Tubanavau has been collecting accounts of *vilavilairevo* for the last 30 years. On several occasions, Hau'ofa and I discussed how the coercions operated by the representatives of the Methodist and Pentecostal Christian churches were pointing the finger at the *vilavilairevo* ceremony, inducing the Sawau *dauvila* (lit. experts in firewalking) to abandon their efforts to reproduce their traditional culture and instead to make a self-conscious effort to take on a new national (Methodist) or global (Pentecostal) culture (Robbins 2004:9). The church representatives are asking the *dauvila*, to use Sahlins' words (1992:24), "to hate what they already have, what they have always considered their well being."

This article seeks to reflect on the social tensions surrounding the *vilavilairevo* that have been created by denominational oppositions. These ongoing social tensions index not just how contemporary Christian defensive and offensive strategies challenge local beliefs and practices, but how these beliefs and practices are strategically re-interpreted under the lens of competitive Christian denominations independently from their local cultural and historical contexts.

Feeding the Myth, Processualizing Culture

Tui Namoliwai is the 'god of firewalking', head of the group of *veli* inhabiting the Namoliwai region, who are often simply called *gone*, literally 'children'. They are described as dark-skinned and shorter than men, with square-built physiques, long thick hair and a particular idiosyncratic distaste for coconuts. They also sing sweetly, and occasionally gratify the Fijians with a song (Seemann 1973[1862]:204).

Several people in Beqa claim to have seen them or dreamed about them. One day, Wame Turanivalu, a *dauvila* from Dakuibeqa, told me that his wife, originally from Lau, had a haunting dream populated by hundreds of dark-skinned *gone* with unfamiliar faces running naked around the *lovo* (fire-pit) in front of their house on Dakuibeqa's waterfront. That particular fire-pit had been prepared a few days before to host a private *vilavilairevo* for the Royal Davui Resort manager and the hotel's official photographer, who were working on a new brochure. Wame believes that his wife's dream revealed an error in the execution of the ceremony, which in fact was not properly closed, for it had turned out to be more photo shoot than ceremony (Wame Turanivalu pers. comm.).

In another instance, Waisake Ratulolo, a *dauvila* from Dakuibeqa, told me of being approached after a performance at the Naviti Resort by a puzzled Australian tourist who showed him a strange picture on his digital camera. One of the pictures snapped during the show displayed a short, hairy, naked man inside the *lovo* with the *dauvila*. Elaisa "Junior" Cavu, the presentation manager I met a week later at the Naviti Resort, told me that he had no doubt it was one of the *veli*, and he was thrilled he could add this anecdote to his presentation (Waisake Ratulolo pers. comm., Elaisa Cavu pers. comm.).

Everyone agrees on the name and title of their chiefly ancestor, Tui Namoliwai, who inhabits the upper Namoliwai river region in Beqa, mythical setting of the *veli*. There is however no single name for the little gods of firewalking. The array of names used for them in Beqa—*veli* 'fairies, gnomes, goblins', *gone* 'children' and, rarely, *manumanu* 'little non-human, animal-like beings'—suggests that they are not spirits, witches, ghosts or supernatural entities in their classic connotation, but small numinous beings,

always appearing as male, living in a parallel humanlike world, with a village, chief, rules, and dietary and social habits. There are no accounts of them being called to aid in the workings of magic or witchcraft, as benign or malevolent demons might be, nor of possessing people or needing to be exorcised. Evocative of analogous traits is Brewster's vivid description of the *veli* populating Viti Levu's highlands:

> The natives of my time [1840–1910] used to maintain that the forest, and the waste spaces were still inhabited by a dwarf or pigmy people, visible only to the faithful, handsome little folk with large fuzzy mops of hair, miniatures of what their own were like until they were cropped in deference to the sanitary requirements of the Wesleyan missionaries. These little sylvan creatures were called *Veli* and took the place of our own fairies. They loved the woods, the open grasslands and the sparkling brooks, and dwelt in hollow trees, caves and dugouts. (Brewster 1967[1922]:88)

The *vilavilairevo* ceremony was originally a rite of increase, or, as it was described to me, just a ceremony of thanksgiving (*na ka ga ni vakavinavinaka*) free of any malevolent intent (Pigliasco 2007, 2009, 2010).[3] An essential element of witchcraft in Fiji is pouring out a libation of *yaqona* 'kava' to the ancestors (Kasuga 1994; Katz 1993). *Vilavilairevo* involves neither the presentation or consumption of *yaqona* nor witchcraft (*vakadraunikau*, lit. 'practicing sorcery with leaves'). An excerpt from a conversation I had with the late *bete* 'priest' Apenisa Kuruiwaca, from Naceva village in Beqa, well recapitulates the point.

> The *vakalolo* [pudding] prepared constitutes the *madrali* [offering or thanksgiving to the *veli*]. However, the *vakalolo* should not be offered like a sacrifice. It is just to be prepared and eaten straight away. Its preparation should not be associated with the devil or superstition for upon completion of preparation the *veli* start eating straight away… It is more like a thanksgiving, not a sacrifice. The idea [of being associated to witchcraft] was brought about by the reverend [Maikeli Livani] thinking that the *madrali* was a sacrifice to the *kalou vu* [ancestral god]… A pledge made by my uncle [Semi Raikadra] was that: 'remember well that if someone tries to demonise *vilavilairevo*, all [*vilavilairevo*] descendants will burn'. *Yaqona* is not a necessary element

[3] Elsewhere (Pigliasco, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2010), I have written that my study of the *vilavilairevo* in Fiji, and comparatively of the *umu tī* (firewalking ceremony) in Ra'iātea, leads me to suspect that in Beqa the practice had the character of a first fruits ceremony (*isevu*), but is not a typical one. In Beqa, the *vilavilairevo* was staged whenever they had a large quantity of *masawe* (cordyline rhizomes) to be baked (*Na Mata*, 1885:2, Thomson, 1894:194, Toganivalu, 1914:2). Oral accounts recognize *vilavilairevo* as part of a thanksgiving ceremony (Pigliasco, 2007; see also Crosby, 1988a; Kenn and Arii-Peu, 1949:26, 32; Young, 1925:222). Analysis of the rhizomes and stems of *Cordyline fruticosa* and *C. terminalis* reveals that they contain a soluble polysaccharide composed mainly of fructose that once baked could be stored for long periods. The root was also baked and stored to supply carbohydrates (Pigliasco, 2007, 2009b, 2010).

> of the firewalking ceremony: if there would be no more *yaqona*, you'd still firewalk for hundreds of years without being harmed… And if somebody tries to use *yaqona* to gain evil power, then all the firewalkers will get burned. Firewalking is totally a positive ceremony. (Apenisa Kuruiwaca, pers. comm.)

Indeed, I have noticed some confusion about the *madrali* and the *yaqona* ceremony, probably stirred by the Pentecostal Church ministers who may also be the source of inaccurate anthropological reports of the existence of "magic words" to cool the heat and of "unmistakable multivocal references to war and cannibalism" (Newland 2004:8; Stymeist 1996:8). The *vakalolo* (also called *qalu* in Beqa) prepared by the *bete* as an offering for the *madrali* had no malevolent meaning or uses, and was a central part of the original rite of increase. It has been described as particularly 'thin' and prepared in small amounts because the *veli* are smaller than men.[4] The *dalo* (taro) and the *masawe* (cordyline rhizomes) used to be first baked on top of the *lovo* used for *vilavilairevo*, then mixed together to make a pudding. This was then wrapped in banana or cordyline leaves, tied up, and presented as a gesture of thanksgiving from the *bete levu* (high priest) to the *veli.* Everybody in the village was then welcome to consume it. Miriama Naioro, granddaughter of *bete levu* Sevanaia Waqasaqa (1866–1938), daughter of a firewalking mother and father, and briefly in the 1960s a *dauvila* herself, explains:

> It is the *bete* who prepares it. To make the pudding, often a couple of pieces of *dalo* is enough, for the portions must be small. Then it is wrapped with a cordyline leaf. It does not need to be sweetened. The baked cordyline provides the sweetness to the ingredients of the pudding. Its sweet syrup extracted is just like sugar. After it is prepared, the *madrali* is announced and eating begins. (Miriama Naioro, pers. comm.)

What I find fascinating is the way boundaries have been drawn around all these phenomena, how they have been reified, conflated and labeled. From a Christian theological point of view, it would appear unrewarding to indiscriminately place on all these phenomena the stamp of evil. Instead of finding labels for antiquities and expressions of folklore, reifying culture, we should analyze how the rise of a hegemonic state or an institution such as the church regularizes, marginalizes, criminalizes, and charges as deviant all that does not fit into its ordering categories (Kaplan 1995a; Merry 2000).

Levy, Mageo and Howard (1996:15) observe that:

[4] Several accounts also mention small fish and little crabs. Two thirds of the food are offered in two different locations on the island of Beqa: Namoliwai, where in the popular myth Tuiqalita meets Tui Namoliwai and receives the *sau* (power) of firewalking; one third is brought to Narodo, the outpost of the *veli*s north of Rukua where messages are sent up to their village at the upper Namoliwai River.

> Gods generally represent forces of social order but are characteristically more distant from sensual experience. Their acceptance is more likely to be grounded in a doctrine of "faith"… Since Christianity does not provide a well-defined frame for experiencing spirits, it collapses them into a Christian [undifferentiated] demonic realm which is much vaguer than spirits' traditional classification. So when old religions go (and with them former gods), spirits become even more unbounded, chaotic and shadowy.

Ethnonational Spirit and Cultural Cleansing in Dakuibeqa

While it was Sir Arthur Gordon's 1876 "Fiji for the Fijians" policy that planted the seed of modern Fijian ethnonationalism, according to Baledrokadroka ethnonationalist beliefs were evident well before indigenous Fijians converted to Christianity. The Methodist Church has actually morphed into a bastion of Fijian ethnonationalism, becoming a key ideological influence behind the 1987 and 2000 coups (Baledrokadroka 2009:415–16). The series of violent and unconstitutional acts of political protestation that started occurring seventeen years after Fiji's independence in 1970 shows how sometime nationalism, as in Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's words, can be both a curse and a boon for nation building and political stability. The complexities accompanying these acts necessitate a few words on how Fiji's religious landscape has been convulsed, starting when Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka executed two coups in 1987. In the view of Rabuka, and the view of many of his supporters, indigenous Fijian political and economic interests were threatened by the interests of citizens of Indian descent (Tomlinson 2013).

A third coup took place in 2000, publicly led by the civilian George Speight, a Seventh-day Adventist who, explains Tomlinson (2013), took Rabuka as his model in some ways. Tomlinson observes that the coups of 1987 and 2000 seemed superficially like a moment of triumph for militant Christianity, but they eventually drove many to find spiritual solace in evangelical spiritualism (Steven Ratuva 2002:19, cited in Tomlinson 2013). As Tomlinson points out, between 1996 and 2007 the Methodist Church's membership dropped to 56% of the indigenous Fijian population, which, "[a]lthough this is still a majority, it represents a drastic decline over twenty years."

Fiji's fourth coup, on 5 December, 2006 led by Catholic Church–oriented Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, commander of Fiji's military forces, was an aftershock to the events of 2000. Bainimarama called it a coup to end the coup culture, "insisting that measures to 'clean up' the country and eradicate racism would set Fiji firmly on a new trajectory and end forever the bitter cycle of ethno-nationalist coups" (Fraenkel and Firth 2009:7). While the previous coups had "the backing of the bulk of the ethnic Fijian establishment" (Fraenkel 2009:45), now, for the first time, the Methodist Church became

an overt and consistent opponent of coups (Tomlinson 2013). Moreover, in Tomlinson's analysis, the suggestion that "God might curse the country," although not new, has become a leitmotif in Fijian Methodism, representing a sharp reversal of the Methodist Church's previous intimate and supportive relationship with the state. As Tomlinson observes, "[d]iscourse about curses is widespread in Fijian Methodism, both at local levels in which kin groups attempt to extinguish any lingering evil influences of ancestral spirits, and at the national level of political discourse." In this and the following section, I discuss how, in my observation of the events that followed the 2000 and 2006 coups, discourses about lingering evil influences and alleged curses to the *vanua* have been informing both Methodist and Pentecostal narratives in the church communities of the Sawau people on the island of Beqa.

In the village of Dakuibeqa, the word *veivakasavasavataki* is commonly used to signal the end of an era, and consequently, in this case, for the banning of the *madrali* associated with the *vilavilairevo*, Methodist officials in Suva prefer to use the expression *veivakavoui vakayalo kei na vevakaduavatataki* 'spiritual renewal and reconciliation'.[5] The Rev. Manasa Lasaro, former General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Fiji, considered a key figure in mobilizing Methodist support for the coups of 1987 who participated in the three-day long closing of the *veivakasavasavataki*, explained to me that the whole process of reconciliation coordinated by the Methodist officials and the village pastor takes place during two to three months of bible readings, fasting, repenting and praying to God. The process culminates in a three day seminar attended by the chief, all the leaders of the church, and all the leaders of the local women's groups and youth groups. In Dakuibeqa, the *veivakasavasavataki* took place between 1 October 2002 and 1 January 2003. The seminar, led by the Methodist Church's highest officials, the Rev. Lasaro and the Rev. Ame Tugaue (then General Secretary, now President, of the Methodist Church of Fiji) and Dakuibeqa's former pastor Maikeli Livani, included long hours of praying, bible reading, fasting, and abstinence from *yaqona* and tobacco, refreshing the renewal achieved in the previous three months, repenting, and recognizing the sacrilege of performing the *vilavilairevo* and distributing the *madrali* in the village. The Rev. Lasaro explained that the Church's role in Dakuibeqa was:

> To help the people to re-look and to reflect about their traditional customs and re-existence say for instance the case of *vilavilaireirevo*… I mean, that's an old belief system which they believe was given to them

[5] Jioji "George" Konrote, a Rotuman retired Major-General of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and, from 2001 to 2006, Fiji's High Commissioner to Australia, describes Rev. Lasaro as a "systematizer of the methods he practiced. He was the first to articulate the goal of revivalism within the church to safeguard the predominance of Christianity within the country and a pioneer in setting out a strategy for achieving that goal and calculating its success" (Konrote, 2003:10).

> by their own ancestors, and part of the ritual is that they worship their own gods, the ghosts, and small people [*veli*], part of that is the process of the *vilaivilairevo*, part of that process is worship [*madrali*]… (Manasa Lasaro pers. comm.)

The Rev. Lasaro remembered that he encountered discordant opinions among some members of the Naivilaqata clan during the closing seminar in Dakuibeqa:

> [Some of them] were afraid to let go the traditional worship [*madrali*] of the small people [*veli*]… because they were afraid of getting burned [performing the *vilavilairevo*]…. The church has got to look at the way in which tradition has molded the life of the Fijian people… it has to look at the darker side of the ritual and try and portray the brighter side of it… a lot of them are afraid to let go the past, they are afraid, so you need that educational process, you can't just tell them stop, you need to educate them, to actually to realize this is, this is tradition, this is myth, and this is reality. (Manasa Lasaro pers. comm.)

An alleged darker side and curse associated with traditional customs (i.e., the *vilavilairevo* ceremony) emerges even more clearly in my interview with the Rev. Ame Tugaue, who was apparently instrumental in December 2002 in orchestrating the final week of praying and fasting in Dakuibeqa that culminated with the official banning of the *madrali*.

> I went there [Dakuibeqa] by the request of Manasa Lasaro and Livani knowing that in some places in Fiji, some believe, either from the Methodist Church or the Catholic Church what ever Christian denomination they belong to, they think that there are certain things or elements in life, or some kind of beliefs that are still, you know, practiced or observed within the community or society, that is the cause for them of not receiving the blessing from above, failing them to have better developments, for better civilization, they try to see where does the root of all these problems still lie, they keep on searching, searching, searching, they bring one *talatala*, another *talatala*, they try this, they try that, even in some places, they tend to put the blame on those who live there, before them, they were the cause, and the curse is still alive in that piece of land, on that area, that is the ruin in the life of their generation until today, but it's important to escape to avoid from that curse, some thing has to be done, some bring out the bones of those people who died, because they are the one who performed witchcraft here, they are the ones who worshipped evil spirits here, they were the ones who did these bad things and the curse falls on the ground and those who grow up on that piece of land, cannot run away from that curse, and some they dig the soil, the soil that belongs to that clan or that tribe, they dig the soil they take it to church and pray to God, they take the soil to church and pray God to bless the soil so that the soil can be forgiven, those who live on that soil at that time will have the blessing from above, the curse falls on the ground, so they bring the ground to God, in some places some they bring trees, some

> bring grass, anything that is on the ground, but when I came there, *veivakasavasavataki*, means the cleansing or sanctification in English, I told them if you want to try reconciliation to God, true sanctification, true cleansing, don't bring the bones, don't bring the soil, don't bring the earth or any other creation, take you, yourself to Jesus Christ, your lord and savior, because you are the most important creation, of all the creation. (Ame Tugaue pers. comm.)[6]

The Rev. Tugaue's narrative combines the two key elements of "curse" and "soil," a combination becoming more and more recurrent in the ethnographies of anthropologists who conduct fieldwork in Fijian rural communities. When a man in his 20s with a slightly bruised back lies in bed all day, numb, unable to walk, Katz remembered the refrain he had been hearing over and over again in the village: "There is sickness in the land" (Katz 1993:251). Arno wrote that in Lau "an important associated belief is that many misfortunes and illnesses are the direct result of misdeeds…. *Leqa*, misfortunes of all kinds, are linked to social control through this system of supernatural punishment" (Arno 1993:32). Newland (2007:307) speaks of "healing the land," the evangelical projects "to eradicate social ills." Similarly, Becker (1995:112) observed "the relocation of illness" in the community of Nahigatoka, manifested in misfortune, failure to thrive, odd adversities and suffering attributed to supernatural forces. Tomlinson (2002:248) observed how in Tavuki, when people look for the source of their difficulties (ill health, unhappy family situations or lack of desirable employment) they "often turn to the past. Specifically, non-Christian ancestors are blamed for "cursing" the present." More recently, Tomlinson reports an interview in which the Rev. Tuilovoni explained that soil needs to be cleansed ritually for several reasons:

> Humankind was made from soil, as stated in the book of Genesis. Second, in the old days, when Fiji was cannibal country, much blood was shed; spilling into the soil, the blood made it "filthy" (*dukadukali*). Third, he noted that if someone wanted to practice 'witchcraft' (*vakatevoro*), he could pour kava onto the earth. (Tomlinson 2009:138)

These rituals of atonement and apology are emblematic of what Tomlinson calls the "culturally generative" confrontation between *lotu* (Christianity, embodied in the form of the Methodist minister) and *vanua* ('the land' in the form of the chiefly system, plus the ancestors' potency located in the soil), an interactive friction where at the end the former claims supremacy by bringing light to the darkness of heathenism (Tomlinson 2002:248, 251), mostly through the confession of the sinners:

[6] Given the importance and sensitivity of the subject, I decided to include long, verbatim quotations from my interviews. I have chosen to avoid paraphrasing or heavily editing the material, for I believe these lengthy quotations are important for the readers' sense of what is actually going on.

> All of them [Dakuibeqa people], they confessed, they take it to themselves that they are also sinners, the chief [the Tui Sawau, Ratu Timoci Matanitobua], the chiefly clan, the *bete*'s clan, the spokesman's clan, they also know that they have their weakness, their problems to confess about, so that's why, the chief confessed to all of them, this clan confessed to the chief and the clan, they all confessed to one another after everything was done, we all went to the church to confess to God, all to confess to God, who is the head of all the clans. (Ame Tugaue, pers. comm.)

The Tui Sawau, Ratu Timoci Matanitobua, explained to me that he participated in the *veivekasavasavataki*, along with the whole village of Dakuibeqa, because the community interpreted it to be the desire of his brother who he had been suddenly called to replace:[7]

> I think this [the idea behind the *veivekasavasavataki*] was after my brother [former Tui Sawau, Ratu Peceli Vitaukitoga] died, but before he died I think him and *talatala* Livani, they had a talk regarding this, it's not only regarding the *vilavilairevo* but the whole community, what our forefathers did and because they [Ratu Peceli and the Rev. Livani] were saying that our kids were not doing well in school and they thought it was a curse for the village because what our great-great fathers did, so they proposed for us to do the cleansing [*veivakasavasavataki*]. So after he [Ratu Peceli Vitaukitoga, Tui Sawau] died we decided to fulfill that wish. (Ratu Timoci Matanitobua, Tui Sawau, pers. comm.)

After the Sawau people cleansed their past deeds and present beliefs during the 2002–2003 *veivakasavasavataki*, the *vilavilairevo* ceremony obtained the *bene placet* of the Wesleyan Church:

> As long as they [the firewalkers] believe it's a gift from God, reinterpret, re-label, re-examine what they've been doing, and perform the present practices in the light of the scriptures. (Manasa Lasaro pers. comm.)

The reconciliated *vilavilairevo* ceremony appeared to comply with the morals of the wider Fijian community and the Methodist ethnonationalist focus encouraging reinterpretation and renewal rather than removal. In other words, a particular strain of Fijian nationalism within the Methodist church was interested in having the ethnic Fijian community maintain authority over its own socio-cultural affairs. Konrote (2003:12) observes that the Rev. Lasaro appeared to be especially interested in saving the nation, based on the new political implications that he gave to his revivalist sermons in Fiji.

The determination to tie religious identity to ethnonationalism as tightly as possible, of which Tomlinson speaks (2009:166), emerges clearly in the Rev. Ame Tugaue's account of his trip to Dakuibeqa back in 2003:

[7] Ratu Peceli Vitaukitoga passed away in July 2002.

> [During the *veivakasavasavataki*] I tried only to relate where can we see the *vilavilairevo* in the bible…. There was once in the Old Testament when the three people, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego… (Ame Tugaue, pers. comm.)

The Rev. Tugaue's analogy with the biblical prototype of the ordeal by fire is in fact deeply instilled in Fijian consciousness (see also Kaplan 1995a:8–9). Brewster (1967[1922]:258) reported having met some Sawau clan members in the 1870s, who told him "they quite understood how Meschec [*sic*], Shadrach and Abednego survived the ordeal, and this too is another coincidence between Fijian and Biblical traditions."

This parallelism between Beqan firewalkers and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego walking through the fiery furnace of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar has become a hoary leitmotiv in church sermons and in the cultural education kindly provided for tourists by hotel emcees. In a similar context, Toren (1988:696) has argued that the appropriation in Fiji of Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper" implies "both a subtle transformation of the present and a revelation of the past." It is clear from the transcripts of my interviews with church officials that the banning of the *madrali*, or, better, its transmutation into a prayer to God, is the same sort of transformation. The use of the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego follows the same pattern illustrated by Toren (1988:696, 1999), instantiating Fijian tradition, and transforming it without denying historical change or doing violence to tradition.

Similarly, according to Tuwere, the *mana* concept "bridges the gulf between *vanua* and *lotu*: the former with its focus on place and the image of the sacred, the latter with emphasis on time, conversion, and change" (Tuwere 2002:136, 137); likewise, Tomlinson (2009:137) referred from Tavuki "God gives all the *mana*." Insightful also is the perspective of the Rev. Savenaca Vuetanavanua, who wrote his thesis at Davuilevu Methodist Theological College on the relation of *vilavilairevo* with Christianity, under the Rev. Ame Tugaue's and the Rev. Ilaitia Tuwere's supervision. Interestingly, his wife is related to the Naivilaqata custodians of the *vilavilairevo*. I asked him how he relates tradition and gospel in this case:

> You cannot allow the *vila*[*vilairevo*] to stand alone, you should allow the *vila*[*vilairevo*] to be part of the tradition. Holistically, you have to include all parts of tradition, like some sort of a knot that just ties them together, which leads up to the *vilavilairevo*. The Fijian word that I'm using is *mana*, if you want to follow *mana* you can place *mana* in every Fijian ceremony, I see *vilavilairevo* as another manifestation of *mana*. *Vilavilairevo* is good for this community [Sawau]. We have to see *mana*

> in relation to other Fijian effects on the tradition, that's the *mana* of *vilavilairevo*. (Savenaca Vuetanavanua, pers. comm.)[8]

Upon his return to Fiji in 2010, after two years in New Zealand, the Rev. Vuetanavanua told me that his thesis had received very positive comments and his position has not changed: *vilavilairevo* is good for the Sawau community and the *veivakasavasavataki* has proven to be a successful one. He often uses this example in the theology classes he teaches at St Henry's Church in Suva. On a last note, while we watched the President of the Methodist Church, the Rev. Tugaue, slowly walking up the stairs of the Methodist Church's headquarters in Suva, the Rev. Vuetanavanua added that there are major concerns among the Methodist Church officials about the radical evangelicalization process dividing families and villages in Fiji.

Spiritual Enrichment and Cultural Debasement in Rukua

If deploying "big guns" like Lasaro and Tugaue, who defend tradition but blame the past, clearly indicates the defensive approach of the Methodist Church in the face of the progressive evangelicalization of Fiji, the Pentecostals' attitude is offensive, a "frontal hand-to-hand combat, what they call 'spiritual warfare'" (Casanova 2001:437). The Pentecostals landed in Fiji in 1926, and after the Second World War became Fiji's most dynamic, fastest-growing Christian movement (Casanova 2001; Ernst 1994). The largest and most affluent denomination, the Assemblies of God (AOG), shares an orthodox understanding of the Scriptures within the mainstream of American evangelical-fundamentalists who believe in the Trinity and practice baptism by immersion.[9] Robbins (2003:222) observes that, everywhere, Pentecostals are leading "an unabashed, uncompromising onslaught against their local cultures."[10]

[8] Rev. Vuetanavanua met Prof. Paul Geraghty and Prof. Asesela Ravuvu for advice in December 2004.

[9] AOG was founded in 1914 at Hot Springs, Arkansas. The early founders were licensed white ministers of the Church of God in Christ, the largest African-American Pentecostal body, founded by Charles Harrison Mason in 1897.

[10] The term evangelical comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning 'the good news', or the 'gospel'. The evangelical faith focuses on the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. While both the Assemblies of God (AOG) and Christian Missionary Fellowship (CMF) are regarded by their ministers as Pentecostal Christian denominations, like other evangelicals they adhere to the belief of the inerrancy of Scripture. At the same time, they place great emphasis and focus on some things that evangelicals would either reject or downplay; this includes baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and other gifts of the Spirit, and miracle healings.

Evangelical scholar Kenton Sparks observed that evangelicals perceive the bible as a kind of lens through which one looks at life. However, he argued that "the lens metaphor fails because it imagines the Bible as an instrument insulated from the world observed through it," whereas "the meaning of Scripture, as of all texts, is dependent upon its cultural and historical context" (Sparks 2008:327–28). While Fijian Methodism reinforces, in its way, the communally oriented moral system, supporting the subordination of the individual to the traditional community (Brison 2007:42, 46), the Pentecostal Churches in Fiji provide ways to imagine new kinds of communities, replacing tradition with the idea of individuals as autonomous and part of global Christian communities (Brison 2007:57, Kray 2002:410, Robbins 2003:222).

In the village of Rukua on the west coast of Beqa, in February 1961, Peceli Vitukawalu, the firewalking impresario of the Sawau people (Pigliasco 2007, 2010), called upon his schoolmate Alipate Cakau, at that time president of the AOG Church in Fiji, to heal Peceli's father's blindness. Peceli's father's temporary recovery opened the door to AOG in Beqa (Marika Ravula, pers. comm., Peceli Vitukawalu, pers. comm.). Alipate Cakau's work in Rukua started questioning the established Methodist church and supporting more individualistic interests: the salvation of individuals, the health of individuals.[11] However, the arrival of AOG in Rukua did not stop the Rukuan *dauvila* from signing the first contract with a hotel in 1961,[12] hosting a major *vilavilairevo* ceremony for Prince Charles in 1974, and taking a contingent of Rukuan firewalkers overseas to the University of Hawai'i's East-West Center and the Polynesian Cultural Center on O'ahu in 1976 (Pigliasco 2007, 2010).

The spiritual focus of the Rukuans shifted again after an inter-denominational para-church organization called Every Home for Christ (EHC) arrived in Fiji in 1984 (Ernst 1994:92).[13] After EHC had worked closely for a time with both the Methodist Church and the Assemblies of God, the Methodist Church withdrew their co-operation and excommunicated EHC and all its members and supporters. Despite Rev. Manasa Lasaro's attempts at chiefly and governmental levels to stop all EHC activities, in 1990 EHC formed its own church, the Christian Mission Fellowship (CMF), a "Christ-

[11] The successful work of the AOG Church in Rukua is also mentioned in Lawrence R. Larson's *The Spirit in Paradise: The History of the Assemblies of God of Fiji and Its Outreaches to Other Island Countries Throughout the South Pacific* (St. Louis, MO: Plus Communications, 1997).

[12] Korolevu Beach Hotel, 30km east of Sigatoka, whose arson burning in the 1980s allegedly occurred as a result of a land dispute.

[13] Originally founded in 1946 as "World Literature Crusade" in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada, its first chairperson in Fiji was Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, a Fijian politician who allegedly took part in the *Taukei* movement and in the 1987 and 2000 coups (see Ernst, 1994:92).

exalting, prayer-focused, Bible-based, and Church-centered"[14] Pentecostal denomination with over 60 churches in Fiji and a growing number of adherents (Manasa Lasaro, pers. comm.; see also Ernst 1994:93).

Like AOG, CMF arrived in Rukua after a miraculous healing. Ponipate Balanagasau was "healed instantly" (Watisoni Kovei, pers. comm.) after a stroke when his son brought him to the World Harvest Centre in Kinoya, Suva ten years ago.[15] Ponipate's healing provoked unprecedented factionalism in Rukua, larger than with the advent of the AOG Church in the 1960s. While CMF counts today more than 150 people, over half of Rukua's population, the AOG Church in Rukua currently has less than 20 families following the strenuous work of Rev. Marika Ravula, a native of Rukua and a former *dauvila* himself, and of associate pastor Rev. Inoke Biuvakaloloma.[16] CMF gradually decimated the Rukuan *dauvila* by eliminating their income-generating performances (Pigliasco 2007), forcing the few left to hold their occasional performances outside the village's boundaries at the old settlement of Naduruvesi. During my last visit in July 2010, Mika Tubanavau had just finished organizing a private *vilavilairevo* ceremony, the first in four years, for a Welsh television crew. Twelve *dauvila* from Rukua, all Methodist Church members, participated under the supervision of 63 year old *bete* Isimeli Tone.

The ceremony actually took place during a three day Healing Crusade organized in Rukua by the World Harvest Centre, which sent one thousand loaves of bread to feed a crowd of nearly five hundred people, mainly from the neighboring villages of Nawaisomo and Raviravi, and a crew of 25 people including CMF's young gospel singer Nasi, her father Rev. Aporosa Bosewaqa and a four-member band. My boat from Navua to Rukua on 29 July left only after a long delay caused by waiting for all the people arriving from Suva along with five hundred loaves of bread. When I got to Rukua, Nasi, wrapped in a tight red *sulu*, was already rehearsing her hit, *So na gauna* ('Sometime'). The day after, I had a chance to meet Rev. Watisoni Kovei and his associate pastor, Rev. Asesela Lalanabaravi. According to Rev. Kovei,

> CMF is a Pentecostal Church, when they [villagers] convert they become born again, they have to repent of the old ways. Reaching out to the people like in the village we have to accept the Fijian protocol, *vanua*. CMF follows some like traditional links with the *vanua* but we didn't partake in some other parts of culture that you know differ from the ways of belief or faith in what the word is, like we didn't take grog, we don't take *yaqona*, but we respect the chief you know, we have to do community work, we still link with our relatives you know, work

[14] CMF International website: http://cmfi.org/whoweare/our-core-values, accessed 28 October 2011.

[15] Similarly to the AOG's temporary healing of Peceli Vitukawalu's father's eyes, Ponipate's leg worsened again days after the healing.

[16] The population in Rukua in July 2010 was 265 people including children and infants.

> together, live together like in this village [Rukua]. What happened last night it's just a pattern of worshipping God with the releasing of his spiritual gift to the preacher, it's a gift of faith or healing, signs and wonders, miracles take place, we got testimony of that. In the village of Nadroga they were going to the NLTB for their lease land from 2002 until the pastor prayed for them. The next morning there is a call from Lautoka, NLTB for them to go pick up the check, thousands of dollars, that's very amazing. It was very special last night because we were praying for long time for these things, I've been here for eight years, for eight years I was praying for that, every day, we want to see the move of God, we want to see people, 500 people [came last night], just but hearing the word, people from seven of the villages [in Beqa] attended last night, one woman walked from Naceva, down to Naiseuseu by foot from there to here, every night we had to feed them with ten thousand slices of bread for three nights, the question is who convinced them to come forth like last night? That's a miracle, you know. (Watisoni Kovei, pers. comm.)

Mika told me that after the July 28th *vilavilairevo* ceremony, Rev. Kovei and his associate pastor Rev. Asesela Lalanabaravi even visited the ceremonial site, praying away the curse. As Rev. Kovei explained to me,

> When I arrived in Rukua ten years ago people in Rukua were facing lots of problems, there was lots of curse behind the problem, my predecessor [Rev. Anare Lovobola] found out that there is a curse in this village like men in their forties and fifties were dying. Die young. There is a curse because the people in this village, their elders used to worship witchcraft, a foreign god to kill people. I think some people are still doing this. We tried to pray the curse, pray for them in the word of God. The Methodists ignored it, we [CMF] know how to cure the curse, what's the root curse, what's the course of the curses, what the source, the main root, why is it happening, today the curse is still in some people's life, we still try to reach out to them, show the damage, sickness, death, divorce, fornication. They used to feed the *veli* with small fish you know, in Naceva and Dakuibeqa they're still practicing *vilavilairevo*. They're still worshipping the *veli*, they go to church on Sunday but they don't know what's the difference worshipping God and worshipping foreign gods! We're trying to stop also that. If they want to make *vilavilairevo* [to make money] they should use other sources rather than *vilavilairevo* because they'll curse us, it [*vilavilairevo*] doesn't come from God, it comes from the devil. We have to train people to work, how to survive using time, their talents, their gifts and the wisdom from God. You have to look at the root course, *wakatu*. I don't believe in that ability [*vilavilairevo*] if you knew the root course. If I testify to him [a *dauvila*] what is the root course then that's his own problem because I'm not telling [the *dauvila*] what to and what not to do. I just preach the word, he [the *dauvila*] has got the right, the will, the yes and no is from his side. He'll be accountable for his life. Maybe he'll make money but he'll jeopardize his future, his life, I

> don't believe in *vilavilairevo* as a money maker, or what else. The root course is where it comes from, where was the beginning of that, here are other ways [to make money], weaving mats is not from the devil. Our forefathers used *masi* [bark cloth] for clothing, I'm planting *masi* now, make *masi*, get money, sell it, it's a gift from God. (Watisoni Kovei, pers. comm.)

In the words of Christian and Missionary Alliance evangelical Pastor David Fitch (2005:28), "perhaps most disturbing is the way we evangelicals are attracted to big numbers." Rev. Kovei's words echo those of Rev. Suliasi Kurulo, founder and president of the Christian Mission Fellowship and Chairman of the Benny Hinn Crusade in Fiji. Some Christians view money as a form of power to be used well or badly, others instead have exercised a suspicion towards theological justifications of any financial possessions (Eskridge 2000:411, 416). Reaching out to "unreached people groups,"[17] Rev. Kurulo, like Rev. Kovei, regularly mentions money, success and entrepreneurship in his sermons.

While the Christian Mission Fellowship parades globalism, its focus on numbers, large institutions and bigness is probably rooted in the American values of freedom, equality, modernity and economic efficiency; meanwhile in the traditional Fijian way of life "business' remains something often proclaimed "antithetical to things of the vanua" (Tomlinson 2004:191; see also Toren 1999; Williksen-Bakker 2002). What Rev. Kovei is denying is that in a traditional Fijian social organization the relation between division of labor and kinship is still pertinent, and it has nothing to do with business the way CMF sees it. In Fiji, certain specialists, descendants of a particular clan, may be called upon because of their fame to practice outside their village (Pigliasco 2007, 2010; see also Sahlins 1962). In Beqa, the descendants of the *bete* clan are considered experts in firewalking (*dauvila*), their job indicates a full-time specialization, whose disappearance according to Ro Mereani Tuimatanisiga, sister to the current paramount chief Tui Sawau, and members of the Naivilaqata priestly clan of the Sawau *yavusa*, would cause the whole Sawau society to suffer.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to reflect on the social tensions shaking the Sawau community. At the same time, I tried to critically analyze whose cultural views and values are being privileged or debased, by whom and why, inviting the anthropologist to blur the lines between theory and practice, ultimately seeing our collaborators and their communities as our main audiences.

[17] Promotional video available at http://wn.com/Rev_Suliasi_Kurulo.

In particular, I have tried to reflect on how the Fijian Methodist Church's ethnonational approach is a ramification of the shaping of Fiji's colonial order. The processes of local conversion were not fixed but flexible even then, indicating that local practices were being reinterpreted (see Kaplan 1995a:75). On one hand, indigenous practices and local motivations have been politically evaluated and opportunistically subsumed by the Methodist Church officials in the processes of conversion. On the other hand, the Pentecostal denominations are actually those that are currently conforming neatly to the old colonial model of enforced order, insisting that elements that do not fit within their structures need to be removed, not reinterpreted.

More serious are the recent developments that have swept the villages of Dakuibeqa and Rukua, driven by the unprecedented competition between the Methodist and the Pentecostal churches. Emblematic sermons in the villages of Dakuibeqa and Rukua focus on the present and the future, disregarding, denying and disbelieving the past (Miyazaki 2000:37). Aspects of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony, which has been sensationalized by the colonial administration, pardoned by the Methodist and Catholic missionaries, guarded generation after generation among the Naivilaqata priestly clan of the Sawau people, have been recently censured and pilloried as belonging to one of the last bastions of indigenous heathenism. Under a new skin, the surviving ritual performance is destined over time to bend to the point of denying its implicit inner normative cultural codes. From an etiological point of view, the excising of the *madrali* from the *vilavilairevo* ceremony undermines the whole syntax of the ritual by depriving it of its semantic meaning, and mutilates its actors' beliefs, leaving them abashed and ashamed of their own cultural heritage.

Two decades ago, when I started collecting ethnographic material on the traditional custodians of *vilavilairevo*, I recorded "*Sere ni Vila*" (a song of firewalking), composed by Rukuan firewalking impresario Peceli Vitukawalu, which has this lyric: "*sa gauna ni lotu eqo e sega ni malumu mai kaukauwa tikoga Tui Namoliwai*" (Christianity did not reduce the power of the little people of Tui Namoliwai). In the last ten years, while Fijian Methodism allowed a wide range of reordering strategies and reinterpretations, Pentecostalism has been marking with infamy a whole community, denying its members their own agency in safeguarding tradition, and forcing a sectarianism that is splitting what Sawau people call their *na bula vakaveiwekani* 'kinship way of life'. In both cases, denominational politics of demonization in Beqa are forcing the actors to free themselves from a demonic past by not repeating it, accelerating the profound sense of loss (Tomlinson 2009) and throwing the community into a possible existential anxiety (*nuiqawaqawa*) produced by a sense of sinfulness and sin.

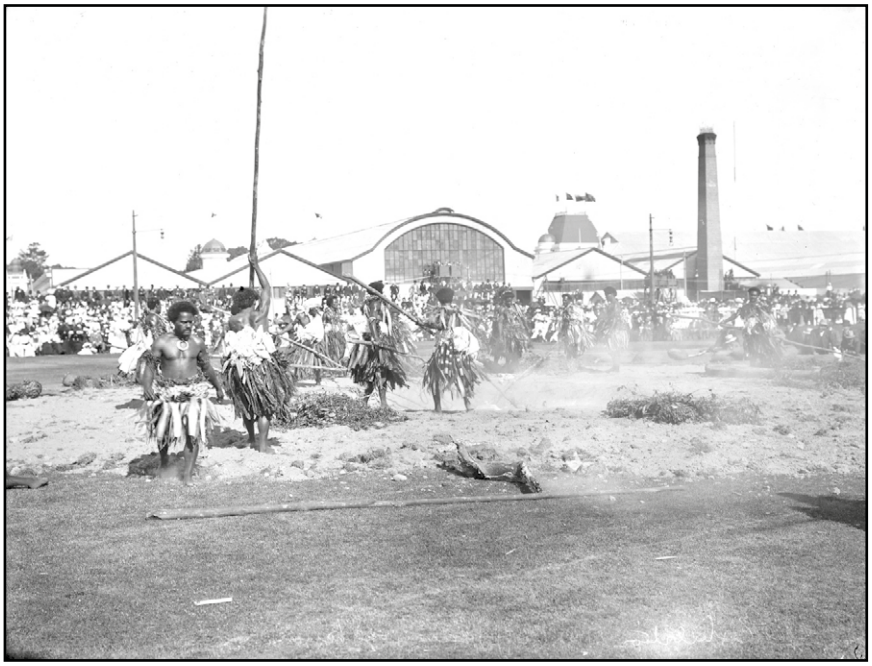

Figure 5. *17 December 1906*
Twenty-six firewalkers from the Sawau tribe, led by *bete* (traditional priest) Kalebi Biu, attended the New Zealand International Exhibition held in Christchurch. In the photo, a few of them are preparing for the *vilavilairevo*. Courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library.

CHAPTER 3

FROM COLONIAL POMP TO TOURISM REALITY: COMMODIFICATION AND CANNIBALIZATION OF THE FIJIAN FIREWALKING CEREMONY

> In 1935 the rite [firewalking] was performed before two members of the British Medical Association. The eminent doctors examined the men carefully before and after the ceremony… The men of Mbengga [*sic*], not knowing of these learned disputations, unconcernedly carry on the strange custom of their ancestors.
>
> — Luis Marden (1958:560–1), *National Geographic*

> The Fijians had another way of disposing of the bodies. They ate them… This was a culture devoted to killing, and when there wasn't an enemy around to meet their needs, chiefs took to killing the commoners among them.
>
> — J. Maarten Troost (2006:175), *Getting Stoned with Savages: A Trip through the Islands of Fiji and Vanuatu*

Introduction

The Fijian firewalking ceremony (*vilavilairevo*), traditionally performed only by members of the Sawau community on the island of Beqa, is a prime example of a propitiation ritual that has become romanticized and subsequently commodified to suit the requirements of tourism. Over the last two centuries the ceremony has been shaped by the requirements of tourism as well as those of colonial pomp and circumstance, finally emerging as a signature brand statement of Fijian national culture (Pigliasco 2010; Pigliasco and Colatanavanua 2005; Pigliasco and Lipp 2011). *Vilavilairevo*, literally "jumping into the earth oven," belongs to that set of topics haphazardly pillaged and investigated by scientists, psychologists, folklorists, missionaries, travel writers, and anthropologists. This traditional cultural expression, owned by the Naivilaqata priestly clan of the Sawau community of Beqa, has been

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often misconceived and misrepresented, with the result of a degradation and debasement of their beliefs and actions.[1]

The earliest commentators on the cross-cultural phenomenon of Fijian firewalking speculated about the body-mind relationship of people undergoing the ordeal. Some early scholars found the "paranormal" aspect of firewalking especially alluring, while others attempted "scientific" observations. The history of scientific investigation of the firewalk is largely a history of skepticism, however. Some recorded the temperature of the bed of burning coals or hot rocks (Haggard 1903), determined how long the feet of the firewalkers were in contact with the fire, and measured the flow of blood to their feet and the thickness of their calluses (Marden 1958:560–1; see also Danforth 1989:208). In Beqa, Fulton (1903:191) took samples of the stones used by firewalkers.[2] Some early observers tried walking on fire themselves.[3] A few burned their trousers (Langley 1901), and in 1892 Lady Thurston casually dropped her handkerchief in the fire to see if it would burn (Jackson 1894:73; Lindt 1893:52; Thomson 1894:204).

An even greater interest in the sensational and spectacular emerges in the travel and tourist literature. These articles are essential for understanding the dialogical construction of the modern spectacle from the point of view of the tourist. A clichéd equation stands out in some of the anthropological literature as well: *vilavilairevo* equals tourism. Most of the accounts place the *vilavilairevo* ceremony at the heart of their arguments on commodification

[1] Elsewhere (Pigliasco 2007a, 2009b, 2010), I have written that my study of the *vilavilairevo* in Fiji, and comparatively of the *umu tī* (firewalking ceremony) in Ra'iātea, leads me to suspect that in Beqa the practice had the character of a first fruits ceremony (*isevu*), but is not a typical one. In Beqa, the *vilavilairevo* was staged whenever they had a large quantity of *masawe* (cordyline rhizomes) to be baked (NM 1885:2; Thomson 1894:194; Toganivalu 1914:2). Oral accounts recognize *vilavilairevo* as part of a thanksgiving ceremony (Pigliasco 2007a, 2009b, 2010; see also Crosby 1988a; Kenn and Arii-Peu 1949:26, 32; Young 1925:222). Analysis of the rhizomes and stems of *Cordyline fruticosa* and *C. terminalis* reveals that they contain a soluble polysaccharide composed mainly of fructose that once baked could be stored for long periods. The root was also baked and stored to supply carbohydrates (Pigliasco 2007a, 2009b, 2010). While the observance of taboos has become in the meantime less necessary as a function of Christian practice, until the early 2000s, every time the *masawe* were cooked, the *bete* (traditional priest) of the Naivilaqata clan offered a small but symbolically important portion of *qalu* or *vakalolo* (a sweet pudding) made of taro mixed with baked cordyline sugar to the *veli* (little gods of firewalking). These *madrali* (offerings) were a necessary condition for the desacralization of the new harvest.

[2] Robert Fulton was a physician on a New Zealand ship. He had one of the stones from the *lovo* carried for miles in a palm-leaf basket back to the ship. He tried to cool it off in the sea, but the stone, still hot, fell out of the basket and he had to drop it overboard, conserving only a fragment, later analyzed by Professor Park of the Otago School of Mines (Simpson 1955:238).

[3] Notably, Colonel Gudgeon, Governor of Rarotonga in Rarotonga (Gudgeon 1899:58–60; Henry 1901:54; Lang 1901:454) and George Ely Hall, the Turkish Consul-General, with Commodore Germinot in Taha'a in 1900 (Henry 1901:54; Lang 1901:454).

and staged or emergent authenticity (Britton 1979; Burns 1993, 1994, 2003; Crick 1989; Brown 1984; Linnekin 1997; Oram 1997; Rajotte 1978a, 1978b, 1982; Smith 1989; Stanley 1998; Stymeist 1996; Thompson 1973; Wood 1997). "Emergent authenticity" is a term coined by Cohen (1988), stressing one aspect of the wider phenomenon of "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). It connotes that "a cultural product, or trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic, may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic even by experts" (Cohen 1988:279–80).

My initial interest in studying tourism from an anthropological perspective was to look at the intersection of intellectual property and cultural tourism to disentangle the intertwined topics of property, commodification, tradition, and change on the Island of Beqa and understand the ways in which the *vilavilairevo* ceremony is reshaped. More recently I also became interested in understanding how tourism reaches and changes the relationship between the cultural products and the society that produces them. In Mortensen and Nicholas's (2010:11) words, "communities involved in cultural tourism navigate a variety of challenges in pursuit of satisfying and sustainable initiatives."

In the contemporary context of media promotion and the burgeoning industry of world tourism, indigenous rituals that have become commodified represent a well defined and highly active point of contact between local and global realities. In such ritual performances, and in the organizational and discursive practices that support them, indigenous and globalized systems of identity, economics, law, and aesthetics interact in dialogic processes of representation and transformation.

In this chapter, I intend to examine how culture, taste, and values may function to legitimate the power of dominant cultural and social forces in representing traditional cultural expressions like the *vilavilairevo* ceremony of the Sawau people, and what impacts these have. While a preoccupation with authenticity has motivated much of the contemporary writing on tourism, the issue Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1994) observe appears to be more one of "authentication," that is, who has the power to represent whom. Said (1978), Foucault (1980), Appadurai (1986), Marcus and Myers (1995), Trask (1993), and others suggest that the power to represent or to consume other cultures is a form of "domination." In this paper, however, I employ the concept of cultural cannibalization, a western ideological device, a colonial tool, and a particular tourist gaze to consume, and represent for popular consumption, the alien Other in Fiji and Oceania.

Accidental Cannibals, Exotic Arenas

Early colonial accounts indicate that the ceremony was being performed to entertain colonial representatives and foreign dignitaries visiting Fiji by the end of the nineteenth century (Allardyce 1904; Haggard 1903; Hocken 1898; Jackson et al. 1899; NM 1885; Lindt 1893; Thomson 1894). All accounts mention the name of the native intermediary who arranged for *vilavilairevo* to be exhibited on the Island of Beqa: Jonacani Dabea, the Turaga-ni-Lewa i Taukei mai Rewa (Native Stipendiary Magistrate of Rewa), a *bete* (member of the priestly clan) originally from Rukua village in Beqa (CF 1907; Lindt 1893; NM 1885; Thomson 1894). Whether the first colonial officials who traveled to Beqa to witness the *vilavilairevo* were emulating the grand voyages of Stendhal or were just proto-tourists, Jonacani Dabea can be seen as the first "impresario" of the *vilavilairevo* spectacle (Pigliasco 2010b).

As a result of missionary and colonial activity and education, money became a main factor of change in Pacific island economies as people pursued wealth and prestige. Boyd (1986), for example, argues that the emergence of the singsing bisnis in Papua New Guinea's Eastern Highlands should be understood within the context of post-colonial tourist pressures that radically altered the political economy of the region. The Fijian village economy differs from capitalist economy, so commodification is not the best term for explaining the monetization of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony. Diachronically, it appears to have been an innocuous economic process. It allows the whole community to be engaged, while preserving and emphasizing the authority structure and traditional knowledge of the social order and socio-cultural relationships (*kila ni bula vakaveiwekani kei naitovo*) as the chief, the Tui Sawau, and the Naivilaqata *turaga ni matataqali* (head of the priestly clan) direct the mode and volume of production.

The entrepreneurship related to the *vilavilairevo* ceremony represents a small scale cash-generating enterprise which is expected to yield substantial long-term financial returns to the participants and their kin. Unlike Papua New Guinea's singsing, the returns and prestige accumulated with the *vilavilairevo* in Beqa are communally shared. However, a tendency toward more self-interested endeavors emerged in the early 1970s among a new category of entrepreneurs and promotional agents. Currently, seven groups from the Sawau *yavusa* are currently performing *vilavilairevo* on a regular basis, approved by the Tui Sawau and the Naivilaqata priestly clan elders in Dakuibeqa, for a total of more than one hundred male individuals between 15 and 65 years old entitled to perform it. There are five groups on Beqa: three

from Dakuibeqa, one from Naceva, and one from Soliyaga;[4] outside Beqa, there are two groups: one from the neighbor island of Yanuca and one from Lepanoni settlement in Deuba on Viti Levu.

The interplay between romance and realism, along with the construction of authenticity, is a complex representational process reflecting past international folklore exhibitions, human showcases, and exotic antiquities. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, exotic postcards marked genuineness. They circulated idealized images of natives while promoting tourism (Desmond 1999:43). Generally only available at remote tourist locations, they became specimens and trophies guaranteeing reality (Stewart 1984). To be alluring, they had to mix exotic scenery with exotic natives, preferably depicted as primitives living in the past.

Colonial photography is more than mere representation or objectification, but is, according to Bacchilega (2007:13, 19), a form of "translation." Lutz and Collins (1993:215) argue that "the multiplicity of looks is at the root of a photo's ambiguity, each gaze potentially suggesting a different way of viewing the scene." For example, postcards moved across oceans reproducing the racial theories and stereotypes that assisted European expansionism and the binary opposition of civility versus savagery (Maxwell 1999:9, 14) In Fiji, rare postcards showing the *vilavilairevo* ceremony represented the exotic to tourists who wanted to see real natives in their native environment doing real native things (Desmond 1999:120).

What matters, Bacchilega (2007:20) points out, is that "these stereotypical images were accepted as 'real'," and the coded realism of photographs of faraway places and peoples was thus seen to provide more powerful "evidence" than words (Maxwell 1999:11). In Lutz and Collins' (1993:215) words, "we are captured by the temptation to view the photographs as more real than the world or at least as a comfortable substitute for it." The situation in the past was not much different from the situation in contemporary times. Baudrillard (2001) observes that in the era of the media and consumer society, people have fewer and fewer relationships to external reality; they are caught up in the play of images. Brookfield notes (1989) that the developed world loves the Pacific that it has created through its own mythology. Thus, cannibals, headhunters, indigenous warriors, and "profane" rituals have been dominant in the play of images since the advent of cultural tourism. In tourist postmodern reality, the Fijian firewalkers have been often misrepresented and conflated with cannibals and sorcerers by both tourist practitioners (McDermott 1978) and

[4] As for the village Rukua, religious divergences and ongoing tensions among villagers caused the sporadic performances to be staged "outside" the village's boundaries at the old settlement of Naduruvesi, often without the explicit consent of the Naivilaqata clan custodians in Dakuibeqa (Pigliasco 2007a:304–5, 2012).

anthropologists.[5] As Mortensen and Nicholas (2010:11) point out, "it takes but a moment to snap and upload a picture of a sacred site to a travel blog. What are the implications and effects of such practices that may threaten the special character of a ritual performance? When, how and to whom does it matter?"

The routinized presentation of the firewalking evening show at the Naviti Resort on Viti Levu's Coral Coast is designed to elicit cannibal nostalgia in a tongue-in-cheek manner.

> For those who would like to take photos you can move in a little bit closer, take a quick one… move in closer, but not too close! These men haven't had a white man for years… one white man was cooked in this kind of pit, that was long time ago, the missionary Mr. Thomas Baker, if you go to the [Fiji] Museum, I don't mean to offend people… keep smiling! That was long time ago! [audience laughing] If you go to the museum you will only see a bit of the sole of his shoes, the cannibals they ate his shoes too, good chewing gum! [audience laughing][6]

The time of cannibal tours, it seems, has not ended yet but merely been reformulated for the fast-paced modern capitalist economy. Lindebaum and others argue that primitivism, and especially the icon of the cannibal, retains much of its ideological force (Lindebaum 2004:491; MacCannell 1992b:19; Schutte 2003:473). Lutkehaus (1989:423), for example, points out the metaphysical aspect of the western fascination with the exotic "Primitive Other" when a group of rich tourists cruising up the "mysterious" Sepik River in Papua New Guinea are caught by the camera of Dennis O'Rourcke in his much-discussed docu-film *Cannibal Tours* (1981). MacCannell (1988:45 in Lutkehaus 1989:427) observes that "a lesson of the film is that the New Guineans experience their myths as myths, while the tourists experience their myths as symptoms of hysteria."

O'Rourcke believes that voyeurism and nostalgia are both fueling myths like those of the Noble Savage and cannibalism (see Kilgour 1998:247). In more recent times, in order to serve cultural tourists with a spoonful of nostalgia, instead of "importing" the tourists to the village, in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's words (1998:61), "the village is exported." There are different ways in which the tourist site produces the desired effect. The largest resorts and the Arts Village host firewalking shows in "firewalking arenas" lit by *tiki* torches.[7] Bleachers under a semicircular thatched roof are about ten feet away from

[5] Some either simplistic or superficial analyses have attempted to infuse the *vilavilairevo* with "referents to war and cannibalism" (Stymeist 1996:15), or "magic" and "idolatry" (Newland 2004:8).

[6] Elaisa "Junior" Cavu, Naviti Resort, Fiji, 23 March 23, 2005, h. 18:30.

[7] Fiji's first theme park, Pacific Harbour Cultural Centre (PHCC), less than a mile east of Deuba, modeled after the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawai'i, was renovated and reopened as Arts Village in 2005. Until then, under the direction of Manoa Rasigatale, impresario,

the pit in the middle of the arena. A statuesque Fijian welcomes the public at the entrance to the arenas at the Warwick Hotel and at Fijian-Shangri-La Resorts. The arenas resemble movie sets more than open air stages; they are transformed into recognizable versions of the exotic landscapes seen in films and reality shows such as *Survivor* (see Stanley 1998:20).

At Beqa Lagoon Resort on Beqa Island, shows are held once a week at sunset, a few yards from the beach. Combining the wild and the civilized, the atmosphere is very colonial-chic with *tiki* torches blowing in the breeze and rattan chairs placed for the occasion around the *lovo* (fire pit). The guests usually emerge from the bar's veranda with their aperitifs and cameras a few minutes before the firewalkers make their colorful entrance. There are no restrictions on the guests, who circulate during the show, taking pictures and even touching the firewalkers' feet. Right after the show, before dinner is served, guests mingle and have their photographs taken with the firewalkers. This temporary intimacy allows guests to ask questions, usually about the firewalkers' "paranormal" power and analgesia.

A similar mise en scène is offered at the Royal Davui on Ugaga Island just across from Beqa, one of the top five luxury resorts in Fiji. The resort's online advertisement promises a "*new* legendary Fijian Firewalking experience," subverting the clichéd image of the *dauvila* in the pit by offering just a close up of a young *dauvila* wearing a colorful ceremonial wreath (*salusalu*), creating a sense of intimacy. Here, the guests descend from the Banyan Bar & Lounge at their discretion; there are no announcements, stage managers, recitations of the legend, or assigned seating area. This also allows a relaxed intimacy as guests stand around the performance space sipping their drinks. The scenes at both these resorts probably contribute to what Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett call "tourism realism" (1994). This kind of realism can be distinguished from the vulgar simulation of authenticity offered at all the other hotels and the Arts Village. This calculated "realism" has enough spectacle mixed with exotic danger to be credible but not too much to disturb the guests (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994). As with the Mayers Ranch performance of the Maasai in East Africa, the example Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discuss, firewalking becomes experience theater built on improvisational, kinesthetic, tactual, and intimate principles, where indigenous performances and indigenous bodies, detached from their cultural context, are marked, polished, and unmediatedly offered to the guests.

playwright, and a connoisseur of Fiji's ancient traditions, the *vilavilairevo* ceremony was reshaped and choreographed into the Centre's signature experience.

Cultural Icons, National Symbols

In his analysis of tourism for nation building and the invention of national identity in Fiji, Bossen (2000) observes that the state may become the organizer of cultural reproductions and licensing authority concerning the authenticity and quality of products and souvenirs sold to tourists. Also, the state may become the arbiter of conflicts between ethnic groups that compete with each other and the state for access to the opportunities provided by tourism, as in Fiji's pending Decree to Protect the Indigenous Intellectual Property Rights in Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture (Pigliasco 2009a, 2011).

In 1885 and 1892, the firewalking ceremony was performed before a vice-regal party, a few colonial officials, various chiefs from Viti Levu, and five hundred natives. As Bigay et al. (1981) and Crosby (1988a) speculate, it is possible that the village or villages involved received some form of compensation from Thurston's government, although neither Lindt (1893:51) nor Hocken (1898:668) mention recompense.

According to Rukuan elder Aporosa Bulivou, firewalking exhibitions were not yet deterritorialized and commercialized at the time a group of firewalkers from Rukua and Dakuibeqa was invited to participate in the New Zealand International Exhibition held in Christchurch in 1906. They performed nine times under the guidance of Dakuibeqa's *bete levu* Sevanaia Waqasaqa and Rukua's *bete* Mesui Toganiyadrava; Tui Sawau (Sawau Paramount Chief) Ratu Peceli Vitaukitoga also participated (Aporosa Bulivou, recorded by Mika Tubanavau in 1978, quoted in Crosby 1988a:68). Occasional exhibitions were held outside Beqa in Suva at the Grand Pacific Hotel, Albert Park, Thurston Botanical Gardens, Fiji Museum, and Government House.

In 1954, Dakuibeqa's firewalkers were called to escort Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh on a special Tasmanian Empire Limited Airways flight from Suva to Auckland. A group of selected firewalkers, mostly from the *mataqali* Naivilaqata, accompanied by the Tui Sawau Ratu Aca Naborisi and his nephew Ratu Timoci Matanitobua, performed the *vilavilairevo* for them in Fiji and New Zealand.

The aftermath of Fijian independence in the 1970s is characterized by a strong sense of an "imagined political community" (Rutz 1995:77). "Tradition" gained in strength as a consequence of new democratic rules of political competition between ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians, backed by a consenting Methodist Church's ethnonationalist emphasis (Pigliasco 2012). Taking advantage of the inflow of foreign capital and the support of the Fiji Visitors Bureau, indigenous impresarios like Peceli Vitukawalu, known as the first "ambassador" of Fijian firewalking in Fiji and abroad, brought Sawau performers to New Zealand and Hawai'i, welcomed Prince Charles to Fiji, and obtained long-term contracts with hotels and resorts in Fiji.

Throughout the 1970s, with the support of Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, considered the founding father of the modern nation of Fiji, the Sawau firewalkers performed internationally and locally. Most notably, between November and December 1972, *bete levu* Semi Raikadra, Tui Sawau (Sawau Paramount Chief) Ratu Mitieli Baisagale, Ratu Mara's brother Ratu Lefoni Uluilakeba, and seventeen *dauvila* from Beqa were invited to participate in a six week trip to India, sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce of Fiji and the Fiji Visitors Bureau, to attend the 72nd Asia Trade Show. Joketani Cokanasiga, at that time an officer of the Fiji Visitors Bureau, was in charge of escorting the group to India. He explains that Dakubeqa had ties with the central government because Ratu Mara had married Ro Litia Cakobau Lalabalavu Katoafutoga Tuisawau, better known as Adi Lala, who had a close relationship with the Tui Sawau's family:[8]

> Dakuibeqa, the acknowledged home of *vila*[*vilairevo*] was always closely associated to the Ministry of Fijian Affairs thanks to Ratu Mara and his wife Adi Lala. Ratu Mara established a *vila*[*vilairevo*] village fund for the domestic shows and I was the Trustee. What happened is that the firewalkers complained about both their financial and status recognition, thus the housing project took place under the direct superintendence of Ratu Mara, at that time Administrative District Officer in Navua. About ten houses were built with the village fund. I was personally going to Dakuibeqa all the time. (Joketani Cokanasiga pers. comm.)[9]

If the Asaro "mudmen" are strong contenders for becoming national symbols of Papua New Guinea, despite its enormous linguistic and cultural diversity (Otto and Verloop 1996),[10] the Sawau firewalkers are no less likely to become national symbols of Fiji, as emerged from a conversation I had with Josefa Tuamoto, director of marketing of the Fiji Visitors Bureau:

> Do you remember the poster "Hot Days, Hot Nights?" We've used the firewalkers in Sydney at Darling Harbour. Would you believe that we had firewalking there? That was years back, before I came into the picture, before I came into the Fiji Visitors Bureau. I know there

[8] After Beqa was conquered by Rewa in 1839, the Tui Sawau family acknowledged that they were the subjects of Roko Tui Dreketi, the paramount chief of Rewa Province, to which Beqa belongs (France 1969:82). When the *masi* (title) of the Tui Sawau was returned to Beqa, the Roko Tui Dreketi and the Tui Sawau Ratu Peceli Vitaukitoga agreed that in commemoration the Tui Dreketi's surname from then on would be changed to one word: Tuisawau.

[9] Cokanasiga was formerly an officer of the Fiji Visitors Bureau, then went into politics and served as the Minister for Public Works and Energy (2000–2001) and Minister of Home Affairs (2001–2004).

[10] In the 1960s, a National Geographic Society photographer on assignment in Papua New Guinea paid for a staged performance in the Asaro River valley village of Kurumugi. The name "mudmen" was applied to the performers by tourist agents and the dances were lengthened (Otto and Verloop 1996; Schechner 1988).

> is documentation there. I think we have done it also in New Zealand. And I don't know whether they [the firewalkers] have been to the U.S. I know they went to Japan… I think in the past that probably might have been the right campaign. Now, with the information available in the Internet, they [the tourists] know what they want. They come in and they say, "okay, I want to go on a tour that also includes firewalking. I want to go in that and I want to see firewalking…" Yeah, most of them [the tourists] know what they want… Essentially the unique icons in Fiji are firewalking and Fiji Water… The challenge for us, though, at the [Fiji Visitors] Bureau, is to make sure we deliver what they [the tourists] want. (Josefa Tuamoto, pers. comm.)

Most important, this is also part of the process of reconciliation of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony, as it moves toward eventually complying with the morals of the wider Fijian community and the Methodist ethnonationalist focus that encourages reinterpretation and renewal rather than removal. In other words, a particular strain of Fijian nationalism within the Methodist church is interested in having the ethnic Fijian community maintain authority over its own socio-cultural affairs and tying religious identity to ethnonationalism as tightly as possible (Pigliasco 2012:57; Tomlinson 2009:166).

Domesticating the "Myth," Cannibalizing the "Legend"

Elsewhere (Pigliasco 2012), I have explained how Fijian Methodism allowed a wide range of reordering strategies and reinterpretations of the *vilavilairevo*, while Pentecostalism has been marking with infamy the Sawau community, denying its members their own agency in safeguarding tradition. The reproduction of tradition among the Sawau and their *vilavilairevo* practice is causing an unprecedented dogmatic schism between Fiji's Methodist Church and two Pentecostal Churches in the village of Rukua. These Christian cultural dynamics and social tensions surrounding the *vilavilairevo* created by a denominational opposition are swiftly reshaping local notions of heritage, social sentiment, and social capital, profoundly harming the *vilavilairevo* ceremony and its representation.

Over time, the western representation of the "myth" or the "legend" of *vilavilairevo* has distorted the original meaning of a ceremony that has preserved its practice but lost its verbal explanation. Beginning in 1992, I collected more than two hundred references ranging over more than 150 years on Beqa and Sawau history and the firewalking ceremony in Beqa and Oceania. One aspect emerging from the negotiation of the Sawau people's cultural heritage is the western classification of the *italanoa* (narrative) of *nai tekitekivu ni vilavilairevo* (how firewalking began) in Beqa as myth, legend, or folktale. In many cultures, it is hard to draw a sharp line between myths and legends: "Clearly, translation—from one language to another, from one

culture to another, from one genre to another, from one medium to another, and from one discourse to another—plays a crucial role in transmission of 'traditional' narratives" (Bacchilega 2007:13, 2010:3; see also Haring 1995).

The *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* and other Fijian popular *italanoa*, collected and identified in colonial times as "legends" or "myths," served to imagine and market a new touristic product constructed for non-Fijians, where "tourism operates as a form of translation" (Bacchilega 2007:16). Building on Bacchilega's analysis of the Hawaiian *moʻolelo* (stories) published in popular magazines and books beginning in the late nineteenth century, I have elsewhere explained how the Fijian *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* has been mistakenly associated with western conceptions of legends, myths, and fairy tales from the past and hence misunderstood, trivialized, and, more recently, demonized by church officials (Pigliasco 2012).

This is what Niranjana (1992:47) calls "intercultural translation, or the translating of one culture into terms intelligible to another." It is an "epistemic violation," according to Bacchilega (2007:15) and Spivak (1999:161), or a "domestication," according to Venuti (1998:5), in that the colonized world is recodified in terms of the colonizers' world. In the case of the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo*, the epistemic violation or domestication appears to me very selective, pointing at, distorting, or highlighting only some key aspects of the Sawau immortal *italanoa*, ignoring others. If you allow me the pun, the process resembles a sort of cannibalization, where salvageable parts are taken from the original and disabled ceremony, as it is deprived of the offerings (*madrali*) to the patron spirits of Fijian firewalking (*veli*) and managed into an event that is more time efficient and more receptive to aesthetic manipulation.[11] This ongoing process of cultural cannibalization offers a non-threatening Disneyfied image of Fiji and its cannibal past to the tourist industry. Interestingly, despite a changed context, the indigenous actors cooperate very well, for they generally perceive socio-cultural continuity between the old and the new situation.[12]

Film has also proved a particularly powerful form of translation and objectification, and translating cultural norms for the screen, particularly those from isolated or relatively unknown communities, according to Vilsoni Hereniko (2010:16–17), is a daunting task. In the process of the cultural cannibalization of the *vilavilairevo*, perhaps Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Tom Vendetti's thirty-minute *Fiji Firewalkers* (2003) stands out. It cheerfully mixes Fijian folklore and village life recodified through a voice-over by new

[11] See note 1.

[12] Tourism's literature is replete with examples of local people interpreting novel situations in traditional terms and thus perceiving a continuity of cultural meaning which may escape the tourist-observer (Cohen 1988:383; Smith 1982:134; Goldberg 1983:488; Greenwood 1982:27; Errington and Gewertz 1989:51; Picard 1990:62).

age musician Paul Horn. The film builds to a crescendo with the firewalking ceremony. While firewalkers from the chiefly village of Dakuibeqa refused to participate in the filming because the script included a surreal cannibalistic ending in which the director, Vendetti himself, is chased and eaten, a group of villagers from Rukua accepted Vendetti's profitable offer, and according to my longtime field collaborator Mika Tubanavau, also accepted the requirement to wear Tahitian-style firewalking *liku* (skirts) of *Cordyline* leaves, which according to Vendetti were more authentic than the pandanus skirts traditionally worn in Fiji (Mika Tubanavau pers. comm.).

While tourism certainly operates an ideological framing that has the power to reshape culture to its own needs (MacCannell 1992:1), a similar or greater abuse comes from the scientists who reframe the local narratives into a different generic shape. For example, in Stymeist's (1996) widely cited "Transformation of Vilavilairevo in Tourism," published by the *Annals of Tourism Research*, the process of cannibalization of the Fijian firewalking ceremony reaches its perfection. Stymeist appears to draw his conjectures about the *vilavilairevo* embodying "numerous referents to war and cannibalism" (Stymeist 1996:15) on the basis of an arguably spurious rhymed translation of the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo*:

> "What may thy name be, libertine?
> Methinks a rogue I spy"
> The dwarf he sighed and then replied,
> "Tui Namoliwai."
> "Namoliwai, Namoliwai,
> Now, harken unto me,
> I sought an eel, but thou this night
> Mine offering shalt be."
> "The clubbing and the baking whole
> Will follow in due course:
> But these are items of detail
> Which call for no discourse."
> (Davidson 1920:93)

The *italanoa* itself is about a gift promised to the storyteller for his stories. Tuiqalita (or Tui Qalita), a *bete* of the Naivilaqata priestly clan of the Sawau community of Beqa, promised to bring an eel he had seen in a hole upstream in the Namoliwai river region. Tui Namoliwai is the mythical chief of the *veli*, a term used in Beqa and Fiji to describe fairy creatures or gnomes often found in the mountainous areas of Fiji, and populating Fijian oral histories. Each variant of the tale renegotiates the sequence of verbal utterances, acts, and gestures performed by Tuiqalita and Tui Namoliwai. These include: Tuiqalita promising a gift to the storyteller; Tuiqalita discovering Tui Namoliwai; Tui Namoliwai pleading for his life; Tuiqalita negotiating and accepting the gift

of *vilavilairevo*; Tuiqalita and Tui Namoliwai performing the firewalking; and their agreement and farewell.

However, according to Stymeist, "the many prominent, multivocal references to war and cannibalism in *vilavilairevo* are unmistakable" (Stymeist 1996:8). He makes this assumption because he believes that in the past, "before being cut up and baked in the lovo the victims were typically placed in a sitting position and insulted and mutilated" (Stymeist ibid.). Therefore, in his interpretation, the ritual is about the symbolic "conquering of the earth-oven in which a human being might be buried and baked" (Stymeist 1996:9).

I have elsewhere (Pigliasco 2010) observed that this practice of allegedly "conquering the oven" did not become pervasive and institutionalized among other tribes at war in Fiji who also used earth ovens. In other words, why, in centuries of exo-cannibalism, should this deflecting practice have become established only in Beqa? Beqa is a small island not particularly notorious for cannibalism compared to the provinces of Rewa, Ra, Bau, Somosomo, and Rakiraki. Elsewhere in Fiji, cannibal orgies were also probably infrequent (Derrick 2001:21) and confined to ceremonial sacrifices in celebration of victory, the launching of a chief's canoe, or the lowering of a chief's mast (Thomson 1968:103). In addition, as I have also pointed out before (Pigliasco 2010), the Huahine-Raiatean anthropophagic tradition is not very rich, for in Polynesia human sacrifices were mostly symbolic, involving mutilation and insults in addition to the actual consumption of the flesh of the victims (see Cook 1999; Ellis 1853; Mariner 1817; Oliver 1974; Portlock 1789; Valeri 1985). It appears unlikely that, whether the firewalking ceremony was transmitted from Fiji to Huahine-Ra'iātea or vice versa, an identical ceremony with the same rules and syntactic structure had a completely different function.[13]

In addition, it should be noted that the gruesome details of Fijian cannibal feasts (see Diapea 1928; Endicott 1923; Erskine 1987; Lockerby 1982) were not necessarily accurate first-hand accounts as claimed, but constructions of idealized anthropophagy rituals. For example, William Endicott, third mate on the *Glide*, published a book titled *Wrecked Among Cannibals in the Fijis*. An appendix included the story "A Cannibal Feast in the Fiji Islands by an Eye-Witness," supposedly written after having seen such a feast in March 1831. The story was also published in Endicott's home-town newspaper, *The Danvers Courier*, on 16 August 1845.[14] Nowhere in Endicott's original log, conserved at the Peabody Essex Museum, is there "any reference to his having witnessed a cannibal feast" (Obeyesekere 2005:167). Obeyesekere (ibid.)

[13] See note 1.

[14] Sahlins argues that "A Cannibal Feast in the Fiji Islands by an Eye-Witness" was actually written by Endicott's shipmate Henry Fowler, since an "F" is inscribed at the bottom of the newspaper article (Sahlins 2003:3).

believes that who actually wrote the cannibal feast story is not as important as that it was a typical fabrication of ritual, cannibalistic vengeance.

Several scholars have argued that the nineteenth century ethnographic imagination of cannibalism was a colonizing trope, a tool of empire to create a moral distance from the exotic "Other" (Arens 1979; Dixon 2001; Goldman 1999; Halvaksz 2006; Hulme 1998; Kilgour 2001; Lindenbaum 2004; Obeyesekere 1998, 2005).[15] Another problem emerging from Stymeist's reading is his argument that sitting on the *lovo* emulates a former practice of placing the *bokola* (cannibal victims) in a sitting position and insulting and mutilating them before cooking them (Stymeist 1996:8). The supposed sitting posture of cannibal victims comes from a single reference in Peter Dillon's description of a cannibal feast he claims to have seen on 6 September 1813 in Bau (Dillon 1829:14–15 discussed in Clunie 2003:55; Davidson 1975:36; Obeyesekere 2005:199):[16]

> Fires were prepared and ovens heated for the reception of the bodies of our ill-fated companions, who, as well as the Bow [Bau] chiefs and their slaughtered men, were brought to the fires in the following manner. Two of the Vilear [Wailea] party placed a stick or limb of a tree on their shoulders, over which were thrown the body of their victims, with their legs hanging downwards on one side, and their heads on the other. They were thus carried in triumph to the ovens prepared to receive them. Here they were placed in a sitting posture while the savages sung and danced with joy over their prizes, and fired several musket-balls through each of the corpses, all the muskets of the slain having fallen into their hands. No sooner was this ceremony over than the priests began to cut and dissect those unfortunate men in our presence. Their flesh was immediately placed in the ovens to be baked and prepared as a repast for the victors. (Dillon 1829:14–15)

Interestingly, no other accounts from seamen, traders, or travelers include a description of *bokola* placed in such a position inside the *lovo*. Obeyesekere believes that Dillon, who was holed up during a battle, was unlikely to have

[15] Representations of the savage "other" were enormously popular in Europe. Another example is the *Journal of William Lockerby: Sandalwood Trader in the Fijian Islands During the Years 1808–1809*, which contains a gruesome account of a cannibal feast (1925:44–45, 59–59). William Lockerby was a mate on the *Jenny*. His captain left him stranded in Vanua Levu, where he lived from May 1808 to June 1809 under the protection of the chief of Bua. Obeyesekere argues that, while there is no doubt that he was present in Vanua Levu, his account was not written in Fiji, but long after, and that he injected gruesome details into his narrative to please the reading public (Obeyesekere 2005:190–1).

[16] Peter Dillon was born in Martinique, the son of an Irish immigrant. A self-proclaimed explorer, raconteur, and discoverer of the fate of the La Pérouse expedition, he sailed to Fiji in 1813 as third mate on the *Hunter* under Captain James Robson to look for sandalwood.

seen such activities, and probably invented the scene to present himself as a hero in the midst of savages (Obeyesekere 2005:198–9).[17]

"Cannibal talks" are still one of the most important topics in cultural criticism today, for cannibalism pierces discussions of difference and identity, savagery and civilization, and the consequences of Orientalism (Kilgour 2001:vii; Lindenbaum 2004:476; Obeyesekere 2005:265). Building on Bacchilega's (2007:16) observation that "the set of visuals and ideas associated in the tourist's mind with a particular locale" are reinforced by the conflation of messages, it is notable that firewalking is often presented through a variety of jolly reinterpretations of the *italanoa* (oral account) of the *vilavilairevo* inside the enclavic tourist space, creating a "circus exotique" atmosphere, as in the Arts Village's 2005 brochure:[18]

> If you are looking for the Fijian Hot Spot, it doesn't get toastier than bare feet, scorching rocks, and one of Fiji's greatest traditions—the Beqa Firewalkers. You can see it at the Arts Village Firewalking Show. Be prepared to be astonished. Be prepared to laugh, but most importantly be prepared to have a spectacular experience. This Show is a mixture of firewalking, fashion parades, singing, dancing, acrobatics, stunts, storytelling, fighting and is purely for your entertainment. The fire is smoking, the stones are sizzling hot and the atmosphere is moody. You start to get the feeling that what you're about to witness is not for the faint hearted. Now the firewalkers emerge from the island, chanting. It is suddenly clear that firewalking is a male only practice. One by one they do the impossible and pass over the stones with grace and pride. Would you walk barefoot through an 850 degree Celsius fire? This is not something to be tried at home.

[17] An analysis of Dillon's description of the battle also reveals invented names and inconsistencies, such as in the number of dead Europeans (Obeyesekere 2005:220). Dillon's graphic account was nevertheless used in Maynard and Dumas' *The Whalers*.

Maynard was the surgeon of a French whaling ship in New Zealand around 1838. Several of his works about his adventures were edited by his friend Alexandre Dumas (Père), including *Les Baleiniers* (1861, translated in 1937 as *The Whalers*). Dillon's adventures appeared also in George Bayly's *Sea Life Sixty Years Ago* (1885), a collection of sentimental reminiscences based on his unpublished *Journal of Voyages*.

[18] A recent webpage on www.artsvillage.com.fj reads: "The stage comes to life with the spectacular meke and fire walking shows. They include the phenomenal Beqa Firewalkers and re-enactments of ancient Fijian legends. This is an extravaganza of stunts, singing, music, dancing, costumes, storytelling and legends" (http://www.artsvillage.com.fj/culture.html [accessed 7 November, 2012]).

Embodying Postmodern Aesthetics

Communications between artists and consumers are indirect. The mass dissemination of visual messages about cultural products in Fiji and other exotic destinations contributes to a dialogic construction of a meta-culture of newness: the new cultural identity of peoples who are visited by tourists (Urban 2001). Tourism authenticates and renegotiates local cultural products. Through feedback between the market and cultural producers, local cultural expressions are becoming increasingly adapted to the tastes of the audience.

The authentication process happens outside "Bourdieuian space" and right inside enclavic tourist spaces. Nakamura observes that:

> When natives stop acting like natives—that is to say, when they deviate from the stereotypes that have been set up to signify their identities—their "aura" is lost: they are no longer "authentic." (Nakamura 2002:6)

In other words, in these new, altered realities, the native artist-performer has to respond to a distant alien aesthetic. Witnessing western tourists complaining that the Sawau *dauvila* (firewalkers) wore trunks under their *kie-kie* (colored pandanus leaf men's skirts), reminded me of what was observed by Silverman (1999, 2004) on the Sepik; an inappropriate ritual attire may offend tourists' sensibilities; however, it does not affect either the ritual efficacy or the ritual practitioner.

A major concern of the tourism industry is to anticipate tourists' tastes, applying in tourism advertising and messages a sort of theory of reception aesthetics to meet the consumers' horizon of expectation. Hence, when traditional cultural expressions become commodified and showcased in response to those anticipated tastes, a few questions arise: What is the nature of the aesthetic dialogue between performer and audience in cross-cultural encounters? Does the performer apprehend his own aesthetic experience in the reflection provided by the audience's reactions?

The communicative process occurs indirectly between artists and consumers. The "firewalking impresarios" described above are similar to what Jules-Rosette (1984:16), Crick (1989:332), and Van den Berghe (1995:581) call "middlemen": cultural interpreters and transformers of popular conceptions who renegotiate the cultural product to their own advantage (see Bendix 1989; Cohen 1988; Evans 1976; McKean 1976; Nuñez 1989; Van den Berghe 1980).

I stress the idea that aesthetics in contemporary anthropology is a problem of representation and communication rather than taste. Jules-Rosette's (1984:229) work with African tourist art indicates that cultural products are dialogically constructed through mirroring and double reflections between the artists and the audiences. Silverman (1999) suggests that the native artist looks across the aesthetic boundary at the tourists' faces to interpret their reading of the art. Similarly, Bruner observes that Third World South Pacific

cultural displays serve as a "mirror for western fantasies," reflecting back in performance what the tourist desires (Bruner 1991:228).

Artists and consumers are joint producers of tourist art as a communicative process. The communication is indirect. The pattern resembles that of mass-mediated communication, as the artist/performer may never come into direct contact with the consumer. The consumers, in turn, rely upon middlemen and retailers for their evaluation of what is sold (Jules-Rosette 1984:194). Studies of the effects of tourism on host societies are replete with examples of cultural products that, through a dialogic feedback process along the market chain to its producers, are becoming increasingly adapted to the tastes of the guests (see Bendix 1989; Bruner 1991; Chhabra 2005; Cohen 1988; de Burlo 1996; Fillitz 2002; Graburn 1984; Jules-Rosette 1984; Lindberg and Johnson 1997; Picard 1990; Silverman 1999; Van Den Berghe 1995). Over the last century, the Sawau iconic performance has been reshaped by the middlemen (their impresarios), and by the western aesthetics reflected in the tourist enclaves which constantly reinterpret and renegotiate ethnic Fijian cultural products to transform them into marketable ones.

Another example of such processes is the employment by Methodist officials in Fiji of a parallel between the Beqan firewalkers and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walking through the fiery furnace of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. This has become a hoary leitmotiv in church sermons and in the cultural education kindly provided for tourists by hotel emcees as part of a Methodist ethnonationalist emphasis responsible for refashioning ancient beliefs and practices in accordance with the Fijian Methodist Church's dogma in response to an Evangelical emphasis on newness that has recently been trying to ban the firewalking performance in Fiji (Pigliasco 2012). The Methodists' use of the biblical account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego follows the same pattern illustrated by Toren (1988:696; 1999), instantiating Fijian tradition, and adapting it without denying historical change or doing violence to tradition.

Leach argues that "logically aesthetics and ethics are identical. If we are to understand the ethical rules of a society, it is the aesthetic that we must study" (Leach 1954:12; see also Arno 2003:809). The traditionally culture-bound aesthetics of Sawau firewalking performers index their intuition of the *kila ni bula vakayalo* (social, historical cosmos) moving away from mythic reality and toward global modernity. In his early writings, Benedetto Croce (1921)—a Neapolitan thinker who in America is sidestepped and relegated to the shadows of Vico, Gramsci, and Gentil—argued that aesthetics must be identified with intuition, which he used in the Latin sense of achieving knowledge from direct perception or contemplation. Berleant (2002:20) observes that aesthetic perception plays a fundamental role in the art creator's or performer's mind, for the "authenticity" of the aesthetic experience "provides a powerful means

of reappraising and modulating ancestral cultural experience by digging beneath the layers of accrued meanings and cognitive habits."

Believing that aesthetics is consistently linked with ritual communication, Arno has more recently argued that

> the accomplishment of meaning that is outside of language—meaning that draws directly on social experience and spills out of the language that attempts to contain it—as often been talked about as involving intuition. (Arno 2003:816–7)

Similarly, taking Bakhtin's (1981:276) ideas about language and social dialogue, Bruner (2005:170–3) argues that stories are dialogic with culture and history, where tellers and listeners actively engage in an interpretative act to make the story meaningful to themselves and relevant to their own life situations; each story is a dialogic process of many historically situated particular tellings. In this aesthetic abstraction of the commodified product, form and meaning conform to a stereotypical package according to a western sumptuary law of taste.

Conclusion

Jolly (1997:121) asks if Euro-American fantasies "are mere foreign fictions which bear no relation to the realities of Island life." Her answer is "unfortunately not. They surely distort the lived reality." These representations are "an intimate part of the processes of colonization, militarization, and neocolonial dependency." The Sawau *vilavilairevo* indexes how representations spurred by the processes of the tourist industry and religious conversion become part of the Sawau realities, narratives, and aesthetics. In Sawau, "reality," *vilavilairevo* represents a process through which the past and aspects of Sawau social life derived from the past are revalued in the present, where the western spectator provides a new sort of audience (Lindstrom and White 1994:14). In other words, while their cultural products are accommodated to a postmodern present, refashioning these products provides them a meaningful connection between past and present (Bankston and Henry 2000:402–3), reformulating their identity *sui generis* in important respects Comaroff and Comarroff 2009:142).

Borrowing once more from Comaroff and Comarroff (2009:150), ethnicity is inevitably becoming a commodity involving a dialogic construction of narration (Bruner 2005:170) to achieve tourism reality and shared benefits. While challenges of cultural loss, misrepresentation, and misappropriation are raised by the situation, and negative aspects of the cultural manifestations of tourism have been a roaring leitmotif of a certain literature, tourism is seen as a viable opportunity for economic development. The *vilavilairevo* suggests how staged performances of heritage and the images they produce for the global tourism audience also afford the performers opportunities for asserting

various forms of cultural hybridity, creative agency, and aesthetic innovation, and for supplementing the community's social capital (Lipp 2009; Pigliasco 2010; Pigliasco and Lipp 2011; Silverman 2004:339). Bruner argues that performance is "constitutive," for every time heritage or tradition is enacted, it is given a new life, irrespective of where that enactment takes place (Bruner 2005:257), which shows how the heritage industry is a "new mode of cultural production" and its survival depends on intangible cultural property, which lives in the performance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:150; Pigliasco 2009a, 2010, 2011).

On the other hand, the cultural cannibalization process operated by the state and the tourism industry reshapes, reframes, and recodifies Sawau cultural heritage, fostering "the illusion of no mediation, to produce 'tourist realism' which is itself a mediated effect" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:8). Early colonists feared the indigenous Fijians would disappear completely unless cushioned from the harsh impact of market forces (Fraenkel and Firth 2007:3). Over more than two centuries, across Fiji's dramatic changes, the Naivilaqata's gift transformed itself into a utilitarian cultural elaboration, which through the process of cultural cannibalization outlined in this chapter has made "the foreign power indigenous" (Jolly 2005:138).

A dialogic affection for the colonial authority and a spiritual repositioning spared the *vilavilairevo* from being outlawed. Refashioning national stereotypes, the hybridization offered by the independent nation of Fiji first, and subsequently by the tourist industry, spared it from extinction. Nevertheless, the most recent external forces operated by the tourism industry and the new Christian beliefs produce alarming modes of interference in which, to paraphrase Tomlinson (2013:133–4), ideologies of rupture and newness are becoming more central to many Christian and western understandings, in contrast to anthropological assumptions of deep cultural continuity.

Figure 6. *21 January 2005*
Dakuibeqa chiefly village, Beqa island. *Bete* (traditional priest) Marika Tivitivi with his daughters Salome and Mereoni, helping to reconstruct the genealogical chart for the Naivilaqata clan, the traditional custodians of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony. The chart lists 275 individuals, going back eight generations. Photo by the author.

CHAPTER 4

WE BRANDED OURSELVES LONG AGO: INTANGIBLE CULTURAL PROPERTY AND COMMODIFICATION OF FIJIAN FIREWALKING

> Yeah, most of them [the tourists] know what they want… Essentially the unique icons in Fiji are firewalking and *Fiji Water*… The challenge for us, though, at the [Fiji Visitors'] Bureau, is to make sure we deliver what they [the tourists] want.
> — Josefa Tuamoto, director of marketing, Fiji Visitors' Bureau (personal communication)

Vilavilairevo, literally "jumping into the earth oven," a dramatic firewalking ceremony performed by the Naivilaqata *bete* (priestly) *mataqali* (clan) of the Sawau *yavusa* (tribe) of Beqa Island, Fiji, is a prime example of a traditional ritual that has become a commodified tourist spectacle. Over the last two centuries the ceremony has been shaped by the requirements of tourism as well as those of colonial pomp and circumstance, finally emerging as a signature brand statement of Fijian national culture. While issues of cultural loss, misrepresentation, and misappropriation are raised by the situation, tourism also affords the Sawau people opportunities for asserting various forms of cultural hybridity and aesthetic innovation, and for supplementing the community's social capital.

The gift, originally conceptualized as a fundamental social system (Mauss 1990), in the case of the *isolisoli* (gift) of walking on white-hot stones, mythically received by the Naivilaqata's apical ancestor, introduces another dimension of the gift practice. The Sawau *dauvila* (literally, experts in firewalking) preserve their ancestral ability, a *sine qua non* to maintain their solidarity and ethnic identity within the matrix of identities constituting Fijian society, where different groups possess different traditional knowledge and cultural properties.[1]

[1] "Dau" is an adverbial particle placed before a word, or a verb expressing habit and continuity, indicating that something occurs regularly; in this case, an "expert at an occupation" (Capell 1941:53; see also Schütz 1985:268); "Vila" (*vilavilairevo*) is described by the Na Ivolavosa

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Brand, and nation-branding "gurus" like Wally Olins and Simon Anholt, point out that countries send out millions of messages through popular culture, cultural goods, and cultural services, where culture becomes a revenue earner (Olins 2003:169; Anholt 2005:138; see also Appadurai 1996; Foster 2005; Aronczyk 2008). Collectively and selectively these messages represent an idea of what a nation as a whole is up to, what it believes in. The colonial authority, the independent nation of Fiji, and the tourist industry have been progressively making a branded commodity out of the Naivilaqata's mythical gift, successfully publicizing its uniqueness (see Coombe 1998:55).[2]

What they have failed to capture, however, is, in Maussian terms, the *hau*, its essence, which is unseen per se. The Naivilaqata clan's gift, when juxtaposed to other Pacific Island peoples' "gifts" (Nabobo-Baba 2006:112) suggests that branding coherency translates into affirming their ethnic identity with their *vanua* (land) and observing mutual respect (*veidokai*).[3] In Fiji, the relational interconnectedness is integral to the concept of *vanua*. Embracing gifts and legacies of past generations, sharing resources, and maintaining stewardship for future generations strengthens the bonds among people (Halapua 2003:200).

I argue that in Fiji not all commodities are alienable and intended principally for exchange. Appadurai (2005) has recently observed that in most modern analysis, commodities (i.e., manufactured goods or services associated with capitalist modes of production) only partially reflect the heritage of early political economists. A special case he discusses are "commodities by metamorphosis," things intended for other uses that are temporarily placed in the commodity state (Appadurai 2005:38). Although gifts and commodities are often treated as ideal-type opposites, and a tradition of Melanesian scholarship has focused attention on the inalienability of gifts, in this paper I argue that the self-consciously traditional firewalking practice of Beqa Island, Fiji, is an inalienable commodity in the sense that it is transferred by gift, but not by sale or purchase, and it becomes effective by "branding" Fijian concepts of different places' distinct custodianships.

Vakaviti (2005:895) as "cakacaka vakavanua ni kai Beqa eso" (ritual of the people of Beqa, lit. working, acting in the manner of the land; see also Toren 1999:123).

[2] Coombe (1998:55), following Baudrillard's intuition (Baudrillard 1988:6), writes that "the quintessential self-referential sign or postmodern cultural good, I would suggest, is the product brand name or corporate trademark, as indicated by the slogans that propel them into the public sphere."

[3] *Vanua* means land, but in Fiji the term has multiple meanings. Ravuvu (1983) and Tuwere (2002) interpret *vanua* as a sense of place, also as the people of the land, common descent, common bonds and identity. Nayacakalou (1975) and Lasaqa (1984) describe the *vanua* as a decision making group for traditional affairs and the basis of traditional leadership.

The Fijian Firewalking Ceremony

Firewalking, which early eyewitnesses reported on Beqa Island and in a few other Pacific Island communities, is associated with earth ovens used to bake the starchy roots of the cordyline plant (*Cordyline fruticosa* or *terminalis*) (see Hinkle 2007; Ehrlich 2000; Carson 2002; Pétard 1946).[4] My study of the *vilavilairevo* in Fiji, and comparatively of the *umu tī* (firewalking ceremony) in Ra'iātea, leads me to suspect that in Beqa the practice had the character of a first fruits ceremony (*isevu*), but is not a typical one. In Beqa, the *vilavilairevo* was staged whenever they had a large quantity of *masawe* (cordyline rhizomes) to be baked (*Na Mata* 1885:2; Toganivalu 1914:2; Thomson 1894:194). Oral accounts recognize *vilavilairevo* as part of a thanksgiving ceremony (Pigliasco 2007a; see also Young 1925:222; Kenn 1949:26, 32; Crosby 1988a).

While the observance of taboos has become less necessary as a function of Christian practice (Pigliasco 2007a),[5] until very recently, every time the *masawe* were cooked, the *bete* (traditional priest) of the Naivilaqata clan offered a small but symbolically important portion of a sweet pudding *(vakalolo, qalu)* made of taro mixed with baked cordyline sugar to the *veli* (little gods of firewalking).[6] These offerings *(madrali)* were a necessary condition for the desacralization of the new harvest.[7] As a manifestation of superiority to natural calamities to be demonstrated especially when food reserves were limited, the ritual addressed anxieties about famine, intensified the solidarity of the group, and constructed collective hope through the ritual generation of "prospective momentum" in anticipation of the next cordyline harvest (Miyazaki 2004).[8]

Oral Fijian and Raiatean genealogical accounts indicate that firewalking in Beqa precedes the *umu tī*, the firewalking ceremony in Ra'iātea, by almost a century. A reconstruction of the Sawau tribe's history from different oral

[4] See early firsthand accounts on firewalking in Huahine, Ra'iātea, and Tahiti (Henry 1893; Langley 1901; Huguenin 1902); by Raiateans in the Cook Islands (Gudgeon 1899), on Oahu, Hawai'i (Davey 1901), and in New Zealand (Best 1902).

[5] Taboo restrictions on sexual intercourse and consumption of coconut milk were observed for a month before the ceremony. These restrictions were progressively reduced to a couple of weeks and currently are practically ignored.

[6] Prayers to God have recently replaced the *madrali* after the ceremony. The banning of the *madrali* occurred in consequence of the *veivakasavasavataki*, a three month long daily process of religious cleansing that took place between October 1, 2002 and January 1, 2003 in the village of Dakuibeqa, Beqa Island. Methodist officials in Suva prefer to use the expression *veivakavoui vakayalo kei na vevakaduavatataki* (spiritual renewal and reconciliation).

[7] Analysis of the rhizomes and stems of *Cordyline fruticosa* and *terminalis* reveals that they contain a soluble poly-saccharide composed mainly of fructose. The root was also baked and stored to supply carbohydrates (Carson 2002).

[8] Several oral accounts in Beqa tell of periods of scarcity due to drought, floods, and cyclones, such as the "Great Flood" (see Brewster 1967:90; Thomson, 1968:18; Waterhouse 1997:252–3; Wilkes 1945:207).

accounts *(tukutuku raraba)* and interviews makes it appear certain that by the time the Sawau occupied the hilltop fortification of Navakaisese in central Beqa between the chieftaincies of Ratu Golea and Ratu Drauniivilevu at the end of the eighteenth century, the gift of the *vilavilairevo* was already their "exclusive" possession.[9] Since then, *vilavilairevo* has remained unique to the Sawau of Beqa. It has never been claimed by any other clan or tribe throughout Fiji.

Colonial Gaze, Indigenous Impresarios, Exotic Arenas

Protecting Fijians has been the leitmotif of British colonial rule and of the constitutional crises that dislodged the Indo-Fijian backed elected government in 1977, as well as the coups of 1987 and 2000 (Fraenkel and Firth 2007). After the events of April 2009, it is too early to say if the "protective principle" enshrined in the constitutions of 1970 and 1990, as well as the most recently abrogated 1997 Constitution, will be extended in the name of upholding indigenous paramountcy.

As Rutz (1995) well summarizes, the cultural system of the Fijian Nation came into being during a century of colonial rule as an amalgam of original cultural logic with a polysemic social hierarchy, encompassing Christianity, "invented" property rights, and customs of the land (France 1969). It is in this convulsed atmosphere of fin de siècle that a significant number of colonial accounts report "a curious observance of mythological origin" that "has escaped the general destruction" (Thomson 1968:171) being performed to entertain colonial representatives and foreign dignitaries visiting Fiji (Allardyce 1904; Haggard 1903; Hocken 1898; *Na Mata* 1885; Lindt 1893; Thomson 1894). In particular, in 1885 and 1892, the *vilavilairevo* ceremony was performed before the Vice-Regal party, a few colonial officials, various chiefs from Viti Levu, and five hundred natives. Crosby (1988a) speculates that the village or villages involved received some form of compensation from John Bates Thurston's government.

All accounts mention the name of the native intermediary who arranged for *vilavilairevo* to be exhibited: Jonacani Dabea, the *Turaga-ni-Lewa i Taukei mai Rewa* (Native Stipendiary Magistrate of Rewa), a *bete* originally from Rukua village in Beqa. Jonacani Dabea can be seen as the first impresario of the *vilavilairevo* spectacle. At a time of exotic fairs and international exhibits,

[9] Tukutuku raraba are "official" oral histories of Fijian groups recorded in the 19th and 20th centuries by the Native Land Commission, not immune from an understandable skepticism. Oral accounts indicate that while *vilavilairevo* was brought to Navakaisese from the Naivilaqata's clan ancestor Tuiqalita, the first *vilavilairevo* was performed at Malovo, an upland garden accessible from Navakaisese.

the Naivilaqata's gift soon became an international attraction. In November 1905, the villages of Rukua and Dakuibeqa were invited to participate in the New Zealand International Exhibition held in Christchurch. They performed nine times under the guidance of Dakuibeqa's *bete levu* (high priest) Sevanaia Waqasaqa, Rukua's *bete* Mesui Toganiyadrava, and the Tui Sawau Ratu Peceli Vitaukitoga (Aporosa Bulivou, recorded by Mika Tubanavau in 1978, quoted in Crosby 1988b:68).[10]

In the 1950s, a new wave of tourism arrived in Fiji. Under the firm guidance and custodianship of *bete levu* Marika Tivitivi, the chiefly village of Dakuibeqa become a tourist contact zone, while also bringing the *vilavilairevo* ceremony to the Grand Pacific Hotel and to the Fiji Museum, in Suva. In 1953, Marika and his *dauvila* escorted Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh on a flight from Suva to Auckland. Firewalkers, mostly from the Naivilaqata clan, performed the *vilavilairevo* for them in Fiji and New Zealand.

Rukua village was the first of the Sawau villages to perform at the Hibiscus Festival in Suva in 1958. In those years, Rukuan Peceli Vitukawalu, grandchild of *bete* Mesui Toganiyadrava, became the first full-time impresario of the firewalking ceremony. As Beqa's mailperson, he had developed the communicative skills necessary to establish powerful contacts on and outside the island. In 1961, more than 14,000 tourists arrived in Fiji; an additional 60,000 stopped over during their flights elsewhere (Harrison and Brandt 2003:140). That year, Vitukawalu won the first contract with Northern Hotels to hold a monthly show at the Korolevu Beach Hotel.

The aftermath of Fijian independence in the 1970s is characterized by a strong sense of an "imagined political community" (Rutz 1995:77). "Tradition" gained in strength as a consequence of new democratic rules of political competition between ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians. Rutz well describes this period:

> A rhetoric of tradition was the counterpart of a hybrid cultural system that absorbed a colonial legacy in the process of resistance and reaction, overriding all other interests and discontents within the Fijian community. (Rutz 1995:77)

Taking advantage of the inflow of foreign capital, Vitukawalu became known as the first "ambassador" of Fijian firewalking in Fiji and abroad, bringing performers from Rukua to New Zealand and Hawai'i, welcoming Prince Charles to Fiji, and obtaining long-term contracts with hotels. He was astute at interpreting the requests of hotel directors, stage managers, and travel agents. The income received from performing firewalking ceremonies allowed Rukuan villagers to build houses and carry out other village projects. In a letter written in 1971, Peceli Vitukawalu— who seems to have understood

[10] The current Tui Sawau (Paramount Chief of the Sawau tribe) is Ratu Timoci Matanitobua. Ratu is the honorific title placed before the names of male chiefs.

that "successful and sustainable cultures are those which brand best" (Chanock 2000:26)—cunningly emphasizes the role of *vilavilairevo* while requesting funds to rebuild a seawall from the Minister of Communications, Works, and Tourism:

> Sir, we have been killing two birds with one stone with our performances. Firstly, we are attracting tourists to the Colony to see this unique ceremony, hence bringing money to the Colony. Secondly, we are trying to get some money for our proposed project. The money we are getting [performing the vilavilairevo] will probably take ten years to accumulate at the rate we are going, in order to reach the estimated $F40,000.[11] Therefore we request the Government to lend us some financial help. (Vitukawalu quoted in Lipton 1972:90)

Throughout the 1970s, with the support of Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's wife, who had inherited the title of Tuisawau from her father Ratu George Cokanauto, Dakuibeqa's firewalkers performed internationally and locally.[12] Most notably, Between November and December 1972, *bete levu* Semi Raikadra, Tui Sawau Ratu Mitieli Baisagale, Ratu Mara's brother Ratu Lefoni Uluilakeba, and seventeen *dauvila* from Beqa were invited to participate in a six week trip to India sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce of Fiji and the Fiji Visitors Bureau to attend the 72nd Asia Trade Show. The long trip and New Delhi's cold weather certainly were not beneficial to the health of the old *bete levu*. Before the performance, Semi talked to the Tui Sawau and to the whole clan, telling them that everything was going to change in the *vilavilairevo* performance scheduled for that night, and henceforth.

While the river stones used in Delhi were cracking from the intense heat under the feet of the Sawau *dauvila* that Friday evening, on December 15, Semi was inexorably leading his last *vilavilairevo*. He lost consciousness right after the performance. His last words were: "*Oqo na vutivuti gauna. Qai vakei a cara na i vilavilairevo*" (This is my time to go. You continue the *vilavilairevo*) (Samu Vakuruivalu, pers. comm.) His act is considered by the clan's members an act of self-sacrifice to guarantee the community's oneness, the community's narratives, and its ontological security, preparing the *dauvila* for what Harvey (1989) would call the changing experience of time and space progressively affecting their cultural performance. Thus nowadays, when the proper leaves are not found other leaves can be used to cover the pit at the end of the ceremony, the pit is diminished in size and depth, the time spent by the performers in the fire pit is shorter, the way of taking the walk inside the pit

[11] FJD 40,000 was equivalent to USD 20,000 c.a. at the time.

[12] After Beqa was conquered by Rewa in 1839, the Tui Sawau family acknowledged that they were the subjects of Roko Tui Dreketi, the paramount chief of Rewa Province, to which Beqa belongs (France 1969:82). When the *masi* (title) of the Tui Sawau was returned to Beqa, the Roko Tui Dreketi and the Tui Sawau Ratu Peceli Vitaukitoga, agreed that in commemoration the Tui Dreketi's surname from then on would be changed to one word: Tuisawau.

from a concentric pattern has changed to a mere crossing of the fire-pit from its four cardinal points, and the pre-perfomance taboos are lifted (Pigliasco 2007a, Pigliasco and Colatanavanua 2005).

Pita Koroisavulevu ("Pita Tukana"), who at the return from India took Semi's place, is remembered as the most subversive, versatile *bete levu*, for he was the first one able to anticipate and accommodate tourism's fantasies, bringing women to perform when a hotel manager requested it. He reshaped the gift in novel directions, anticipating and accommodating both hosts' and guests' preferences and tastes. Miriama Naioro, one of the women, recalls those times:

> *Era a vinakata ga na kai valagi se vakacava "rawa ni dou vila na marama," qai tukuna noqu momo o Pita Tukana, "e rawa ni keimami na kena dau."*
>
> Tourists wondered if women could perform the vila[vilairevo] and my uncle, Pita Tukana, replied: "Of course they can, for we are the custodians." (Miriama Naioro, pers. comm.)

The "lack of authenticity" characterizing the 1970s prompted Dean MacCannell to observe that

> Tourist consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in this direction, but often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic. (MacCannell 1999:101)

Well aware of that, Manoa Rasigatale, playwright, politician, and more recently television personality, over the years designed and constructed Fiji's first theme park, Pacific Harbour Cultural Centre (PHCC), less than a mile east of Deuba, modeled after the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawai'i. Rasigatale, a connoisseur of Fiji's ancient traditions, believed that to draw many tourists from Suva or the Coral Coast he needed something spectacular. He decided to reshape and choreograph the *vilavilairevo* ceremony into the Centre's signature experience. In Stanley's (1998:38) words "[at the PHCC] the exoticism of culture is demonstrated by a performance of firewalking, which brings the excitement of circus performance with the authority of tradition."

Ultimately, showing his faith in a return to normalcy after the May 2000 tumult (a belief also confirmed by several conspicuous foreign resort and hotel chains' projects on Viti Levu's Coral Coast), Eric Roberts, an Australian businessman, bought the PHCC and renamed it Arts Village. In 2005, the Arts Village inaugurated a manicured firewalking arena resembling a movie set more than an open air stage, along with a catchy website featuring on its welcome screen a polished indigenous body standing on a pile of flaming

stones.[13] Although the "in-fake-situ" image (see Desmond 1999:174) detaches the firewalker from his cultural context, it is designed to authenticate and enhance the brand experience to the Arts Village visitors.

The Gift of the Spirit

Gift systems are so important because they are systems of social solidarity establishing and maintaining the essential vitality, viability, and identity of the society in which they are embedded (Pigliasco 2005). Sawau's communal memory is rich in *italanoa* (oral histories) like those of Semi Raikadra and Pita Tukana. These are some emblematic examples of how the Naivilaqata priestly clan maintains its role as guardian of the traditional knowledge associated with the *vilavilairevo*. Rights of use associated with the concept of custodianship entail obligations to both their Paramount Chief, the Tui Sawau, and to the Sawau wider community, obligations of appropriate safeguarding of the gift the Sawau tribe has been passing down generation after generation. These elements of custodianship, safeguarding, and identity emerge clearly from statements collected from the current Tui Sawau, Ratu Timoci Matanitobua:

> *Na vilavilairevo,na kena bibi vei keitou na yavusa o Sawau baleta e isolisoli e soli vei ira na neitou qase ena gauna e liu, ka keitou se saga tiko ga me keitou maroroya ena vuku ni kena isolisoli bibi baleta ni sega tale ni dua na vanua e caka tiko kina na vilavilairevo ka keitou ga na yavusa qo ka keitou vakayacora tiko ya gona, ya na kena bibi kina vei keitou na vilavilairevo… Au vakabauta niu tokona na nona tataro qo me vaka na veivuke ni matanitu ena maroroi kina na isolisoli ko keitou vakayagataka tiko na vilavilairevo me vaka ni kevaka ena sega, ena lakolako beka e dua na gauna sa na seavu yani na kena totoka na kena rairai vinaka na isolisoli qo. Vakabauta ke vaka e tiko na veivukei me dau vakataucokotaki na kena maroroi, na kena tabaki na ivola i tukutuku me baleta na vilavilairevo, au vakabauta ni na yaga sara vakalevu kina vanua o Beqa vaka kina ki na matanitu.*
>
> *Vilavilairevo* is important to the Sawau tribe since it is a unique gift given to our elders in pre-history. Yet we have to safeguard it, for it is an important gift and there is no other place where the ceremony is undertaken. It is a gift uniquely reserved to our tribe. Thus, *vilavilairevo* maintains a great importance to all of us… Government assistance in the safeguarding of this unique cultural heritage, the *vilavilairevo*, is of paramount importance. If not, there will come a time when the beauty of this gift of ours will eventually fade away. I believe that if we receive assistance in terms of protection and safeguarding, through

[13] www.artsvillage.com (accessed 29 July 2005). Kustino Kurucirinatoga, the man depicted on both the Arts Village's screen and brochure, is actually not a Sawau member. The picture was choreographed and photo-shopped without the consent of the Sawau tribe's Naivilaqata custodians (Pigliasco 2007a).

> publications and media, *vilavilairevo* will be valuable to the *vanua* of Beqa and to the whole nation as well. (Ratu Timoci Matanitobua, Tui Sawau, pers. comm.)

In Fijian language there are three main expressions for gift: *iloloma*, *nabu*, and *isolisoli*. The first is embedded in the meaning of care and love, and thus genuinely interpreted as a present or "token of love"; the second one is a forfeit, generally a material present, like food brought to the storyteller, and hence also related to the *madrali* offerings (Tomlinson 2009).[14] The third, instead, although also applied to material presents, implies utterly the concepts of granting and permitting. In the case of *vilavilairevo*, *isolisoli* has to be interpreted more as an endowment, "a natural talent." Traditionally, the gift of walking on white-hot stones was given to the Naivilaqata's apical ancestor Tuiqalita by the Tui Namoliwai in exchange for the Tui Namoliwai's life. Tui Namoliwai is the "god of firewalking," head of the tribe of *veli* (gnomes, goblins) inhabiting the Namoliwai region, more often simply referred to as *gone* (literally "children"). They are described as having a dark-skinned, square-built physique, shorter than men; long thick hair; a particular idiosyncratic distaste for coconuts (Samu Vakuruivalu, pers. comm.); and, lastly, according to Seemann, "they sing sweetly and occasionally gratify the Fijians with a song" (Seemann 1973:204; see also Brewster 1967).

In *The Gender of the Gift*, Strathern observes that in Melanesia culture is not imagined as a human invention (Strathern 1988:322–4; see also Wagner 1975). Traditional customs and ritual practices are conceived as having been acquired rather than created. Many groups represent their cultural practices as having been bestowed upon them by external donors such as ancestors, culture heroes, or spirits imagined to be superior and powerful (Harrison 2000). In his reconstruction of the relationship between structure, history, and material culture in Beqa, Crosby (1988b) suggests that the *italanoa* of firewalking served the purpose of accommodating the evolution of Beqan culture, from an age of gods to an age when men and gods mingled freely, where the "gift" of *vilavilairevo* does not involve the negotiation of any evil power and it is not the result of evildoing.

In the logic of the myth, the gift brought back by the Naivilaqata apical ancestor to the storyteller is not a *nabu* (a material present), but an *isolisoli* (grant, permit) that should be interpreted as an endowment or a natural talent. The gift of firewalking, a rite of increase in the past and a source of revenue in the present, becomes an *iloloma* (token of love), suggesting *veilomani*

[14] The term *nabu* is recurrent in the narratives behind the origin and events associated with the *vilavilairevo*, more precisely the present of food brought to Dredre, the Naivilaqata's storyteller.

(collective care) and *veidokai* (respect).[15] It establishes a relation between the cognition of endowment and that of custodianship among the Naivilaqata priestly clan and by extension the Sawau yavusa.

In Tamati Ranaipiri's account, quoted by Mauss, the hau, the "spirit" of the gift, follows after any individual to whom the gift is passed on.

> [The hau] is attached to this chain of users until they give back from their own property, their *taonga*, their goods, or from their labour or trading, by way of feasts, festivals and presents. (Mauss 1990:12)

Similarly, in Beqan narrations of *nai tekitekivu ni vilavilairevo* (how firewalking began), we learn that having spared the life of Tui Namoliwai (disguised as an eel), which represented his homage (*nabu*) to the storyteller, Tuiqalita, the Naivilaqata's ancestor, accepts the gift (*isolisoli*) of *vilavilairevo*, promising to preserve it till the end of the world:[16]

> *"Ia e dua ga na noqu kerekere oya me dou qai bou vakarautaka tu ga e dua vakalolo lailai ni oti na vilavilairevo. Me kakua ni vaka niu se vakasuka, kua talega ni vakacabori ia me qai kena suka tu ga na wai ni masawe. Ia mo nanuma sara, sa vakarau me daru veitalatala, na nomu kawa taucoko sara era na rawa ni vakayacora na Vilavilarevo me tekivu ni kua ka yacova na tavuki ni vuravura." Rau sa qai lululu na veitau ka veivakamocetaki. Me yacova na siga ni kua sa dei tu ga na isolisoli levu oqo.*
>
> "However, I have a simple request: prepare a small *vakalolo* [pudding] after the *vilavilairevo*. Ingredients of the *vakalolo* should not consist of scraped coconut or sugar, however, syrup from the *masawe* [cordyline plant] can be used to sweeten it. But, please do remember now that we are about to part, that all your descendants from now on till the end of the world will possess the ability of performing the *vilavilairevo*." The two friends then shook hands and parted. From that day until now, the gift still exists. (Apenisa Kuruiwaca, pers. comm.)

[15] Elsewhere (Pigliasco 2009b), I have explained that there are different notable versions of the myth recorded over the years (inter alia, *Na Mata* 1885 (translated by Jackson 1894); Toganivalu 1914 (translated by Beauclerc); Bulivou 1978 (translated by Tubanavau in Crosby 1988a); and Kuruiwaca 2004 (translated by Nemani in Pigliasco 2007a); however, some recent either simplistic or superficial analyses have attempted to confound *vilavilairevo* with the *luveniwai* rites (Stymeist 1996:5) described by Kaplan (1989; see also Brewster 1967), seeing in it imaginary "referents to war and cannibalism" (Stymeist 1996:15), or suggesting that "the story's theme belongs to a common stock of imagery that regularly appears in different contexts in stories around Fiji" (Newland 2004:17).

[16] The prefix "Tui" (to govern, rule) in Tuiqalita's name appears not to be indicating a title. Tuiqalita, sometime erroneously spelled Tui Qalita in the tourist literature, was a Naivilaqata clan ancestor at the time they lived in Navakaisese in Beqa, but he is not considered a deified ancestor (*kalou vu*). My conclusions are drawn from a cross comparison of the most notable *italanoa nai tekitekivu ni vilavilairevo* (story of how firewalking began) in Beqa (inter alia, *Na Mata* 1885 (translated by Jackson 1894); Toganivalu 1914 (translated by Beauclerc); Bulivou 1978 (translated by Tubanavau in Crosby 1988a); and Kuruiwaca 2004 (translated by Nemani in Pigliasco 2007a).

Rappaport, after Leach (quoted in Rappaport 1999:151) and Durkheim (1984), postulates that myth implies ritual, ritual implies myth. In the logic of this myth, it is manifest that the *legomenon* (thing said) becomes the *drōmenon* (thing performed); more precisely a gift of nourishment, a technological ability that Tui Namoliwai gives to Tuiqalita in exchange for his life; an inexhaustible shared source of wealth and prestige that in the past helped increase the reserve supply of starch and sugar, and more recently, with the advent of tourism, has become a source of financial income.

In Sahlins's astute reading of Mauss's classic, he observes that exchange basically emerges under duress, when when the members of a community are experiencing a lack or shortage of wealth among themselves. At the risk of entering into Mauss's purported misinterpretation of the Māori gift, "proceeding to develop an economic principle by a religious concept" (Sahlins 1972:157), the logic of gift-giving offered in the Naivilaqata's myth recalls Vaughan's (2002) interpretation of the gift paradigm postulating that the gift interaction requires the giver's (i.e., Tui Namoliwai) ability to recognize needs of others (i.e., Tuiqalita's tribe) and to produce or fashion something to satisfy them. She also observes that:

> The satisfaction of needs is not done by humans ahistorically, but always takes place at a certain cultural and historical level with the means and methods that are present in the society at a certain degree of development of productive forces, and within some mode of production. (Vaughan 2002:96)

Moreover, promising that all Tuiqalita's descendants will possess the ability of performing the *vilavilairevo* until the end of the world, Tui Namoliwai's gift implies continuity. Lévi-Strauss (1981) argues that ritual is always an attempt to assert continuity in the face of the epistemological anxieties created by mythological speculations, for the task of the ritual is not just to overcome epistemological anxiety and construct collective hope, but to endure.

Kinship, Clanship, and Ownership

In Fiji, property is not a mere relationship between persons and things. Property is a social practice in which people engage. It is a social relationship, inclusive of rights, privileges, powers, and immunities, which governs the powers legitimized in particular cultural contexts of socially recognized individuals over tangible or intangible things. In the case of the Sawau we can say that labor creates property (Gudeman 1986:11) and enacts kinship (Bodenhorn 2000:143–6). In Beqa, kinship bonds are renewed through food, labor, ceremonial participation, earned shares, and onomasticon (Arno 1994; see also Brison 2007).

In a Fijian village, labor is not perceived as an economic service, but as social capital. *Cakacaka* (work) is a key word emerging in almost all my interviews with the Naivilaqata *bete*. In this context, work becomes the performance of a kinship obligation (*cakacaka ni yavusa*), for the framework within which it takes place is primarily social, not economic (Nayacakalou 1978:40, 137). On Beqa, the specialized activity of firewalking quickly became equivalent to—and sometimes suppressed—other economic activities such as planting taro or fishing, since the latter are small-scale, direct forms of production resulting in minimal accumulation of wealth (Bigay et al. 1981; Rigamoto 1973). While tourism is an extension of commodification, according to the ontology of labor in Fijian villages, *vilavilairevo* is treated as a *sui generis* commodity, for the ceremony's survival and the community's well-being depends on it. Tribal entrepreneurship related to the *vilavilairevo* ceremony represents a small scale, cash-generating enterprise that is expected to yield substantial long-term financial returns to the participants and their kin. I can generally say that the returns and prestige accumulated with the *vilavilairevo* in Beqa are communally shared.

Truly, the modern age of money (*gauna ni lavo*) envelops everybody (Tomlinson 2004:191), and a tendency toward more self-interested endeavors emerged in the late 1950s among a new category of entrepreneurs and promotional agents (see also Tomlinson 2009, Kaplan 2005). However, as Toren (1999:29) points out, "money has a neutral, moral value in explicit commodity exchanges, because such exchanges are considered irrelevant to the creation, fulfilment and maintenance of social bonds." On the other hand, of gift exchange she observes that "like any other gift, it marks the continuing obligations between kin;" which is the case of *vilavilairevo*: the continuous exchange among the Sawau clans' members of the gift from Tuiqalita is what ensure that the gift endures.

Symmetrically with the kin group economy in Moala of Sahlins's description (Sahlins 1962:266), in Beqa *vilavilairevo* performance revenues are regulated by kindred autonomous economic committees, as dependent segments of the organic village dual economy, which comprises a traditional subsistence farming-and-gathering sector and a modern cash-generating one. These committees have a hierarchical character like that of the family in its own distributive sphere, organizing the distribution of the revenues generated from *vilavilairevo* among the participants and the households, and allocating the rest to a communal fund. Kindred economy is structured by lineage organization, lending the full authority of the *bete* ancestors to grandfathers, fathers, and senior brothers.

The Tui Sawau, the paramount chief of the yavusa Sawau, remains the titular "owner" of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony, entitled to transfer the gift, or refuse to transfer the gift, of performing the ceremony to old and new groups in consultation with the *bete levu*:

> *O ira taucoko na veilawalawa tale, se na veisoqosoqo ko ra vilavilairevo tiko e so e se qai tiko na nodra ituvatuva mera vilavilairevo, e tiko taucoko na nodra sema ni veiwekani ena neitou koro me vaka ga ni vivi na usu, era dau lako mai era mai kerekere, era dau tudei ga vata kei na yaqona, niu dau solia ga na veivakadonui, ni sa soli ga na veivakadonui, ya sa na koya sara ga, ya ga e vinaka kina ni dua ga na isoqosoqo nodratou mai Soliyaga, o Yanuca, na veivanua kece qo era veiwekani kece ga.*
>
> All groups performing the *vilavilairevo*, have a connection or kin-ties with our village [Dakuibeqa]. They come to us to seek our permission with a traditional offer of *yaqona* [kava]. When I give my consent, they are allowed to do it. It is good that there are other groups [not from Dakuibeqa] like those from Soliyaga, Yanuca and so on, for all these groups are related to us. (Ratu Timoci Matanitobua, Tui Sawau, pers. comm.)

Seven groups from the Sawau yavusa are currently performing *vilavilairevo* on a regular basis, approved by the Tui Sawau and the Naivilaqata *bete* elders in Dakuibeqa, for a total of more than one hundred male individuals between 15 and 65 years old entitled to perform it. There are five groups on Beqa: three from Dakuibeqa, one from Naceva, and one from Soliyaga;[17] outside Beqa, as previously explained, there are two groups: one from the neighbor island of Yanuca and one from Lepanoni on Viti Levu. Elsewhere (Pigliasco 2007a), I have given specific details of the community's appointment, group composition, contractual agreements, and time-schedules of all the groups within the main hotels and resorts scattered between Nadi and Viti Levu's Coral Coast, including the Arts Village in Pacific Harbour. On-demand performances also occur in a few boutique resorts and surf camps on Beqa and on its neighboring islets of Ugaga and Yanuca, according to guest occupancy. In addition, occasional performances may take place in public spaces and at historic landmarks in Suva during art festivals and state sponsored formal functions.

In a traditional Fijian social organization where clans could be the equivalent of classes, or work-groups, and where chiefly aspects of the ruling class are often opposed to those of the *vanua* (to be interpreted here as the people of the land), the relation between division of labor and kinship remains pertinent. In Fiji, certain specialists, descendants of a particular group or mataqali, may be called upon because of their fame to practice outside their village. Sahlins observes that "there are some skills, however, that are not simply family occupations but are considered inherent attributes of entire stocks" (Sahlins 1962:354). While Sahlins is mainly referring to the Moalan

[17] As for Rukua, religious divergences and ongoing tensions among villagers caused the sporadic performances to be staged "outside" the village's boundaries at the old settlement of Naduruvesi, often without the explicit consent of the Naivilaqata clan custodians in Dakuibeqa (see Pigliasco 2007a:304–5).

skilled carpenters, in Beqa, the descendants of the *bete* clan are considered "experts in firewalking" (*dauvila*); their job indicates a full-time specialization, whose disappearance would make the whole Sawau society suffer.

Non-industrial societies like Fiji's traditional model may fit a Durkheimian ideal mechanical type of solidarity, in that moral rules, values, and common beliefs are shared and the same social tasks are assigned to everybody who occupies the same kinship status. However, mechanical societies need some organic limits too, just as the organic notion needs mechanical values and rituals. In this sense, I would argue that traditional Fijian society has developed not only traditional gift practices (e.g., *solevu*, a large gathering of people for ceremonial exchange of food, etc.), but also the gifts from the gods and spirits that are *not* shared. To share them would be to destroy the organic bonds of society. Teweiariki Teareo (2002:13) observes that:

> Traditional knowledge in its various forms (navigation, house building, medicine, etc.) in Oceanic societies is collectively owned by particular clans and families and extensive efforts are exerted to ensure that knowledge remains within the given boundaries. This is critically important as knowledge is a crucial component of the *mana* [efficacy, supernatural power] of members of the various clans. Knowledge is not disseminated arbitrarily but is given only to the deserving ones—meaning, members of the clan only. The really important component of knowledge is reserved only for the select few.

In a more recent talk given at the University of Hawai'i, Teareo (2006) elaborated on the concepts of "privileged knowledge, interdependence and respect," explaining that knowledge is not shared with everybody because the traditional custodians' status and *mana* would be substantially reduced. He also pointed out that owning such knowledge carries some specific responsibilities, such as employing it for the common good of the village or the whole island, for there always come times when the particular skills of different people become important for communal survival.

While Kaplan (2005:43) is right in saying that in Fiji "profit is no longer a sinister foreign deity"—especially if made on their *vanua*—business remains something often proclaimed "antithetical to things of the *vanua* (meaning 'land', 'common people', and adjectivally 'traditional' things), which are deemed the most important things for indigenous Fijians to retain" (Tomlinson 2004:191; see also Williksen-Bakker 2002). In other words, "monetary transactions must not be allowed to confuse the social relations of the market with social relations 'in the manner of the land'" (Toren 1999:29).

In a traditional Fijian community, business is considered something the Indo-Fijians regularly engage in. Interestingly, contrary to the Indo-Fijians' proverbial entrepreneurship, Brown's (1984) two decade old prediction of an inevitable firewalking competition among ethno-Fijians and Indo-Fijians never actually occurred, with the result that Indo-Fijian firewalking is

currently invisible and not sustained by the tourism industry's demand, which has been clearly privileging the "original" Fijian brand.[18]

Made in Beqa

Recently, Wengrow (2008) has argued that commodity branding has been characterized as the distinguished cultural move of western capitalist societies and is widely viewed as a historically unique feature of the modern global economy. However, he observes that comparisons between recent forms of branding and much earlier modes of commodity marking suggest that systems of branding address a paradox common to other, non-western economic systems (see Hamilton and Lai 1989). Lury (2004) has recently compared brands to Maussian "total social facts," a concept emerging in the very last pages of Mauss's famous essay (1990). Making a reference to Melanesia, Mauss explains that among other things (i.e., rituals and dramatic performances, food and services) these facts involving the totality of society "include also respect" (Mauss 1990:79). In Fiji, the concept of respect (*veidokai*) denotes "a reciprocity that must be understood within a framework of hierarchy and beliefs about divine chiefship" (Rutz 1995:75; see also Arno 2005).

During an afternoon chat with the Tui Sawau back in November 2004, the conversation shifted to a resort occupying Sawau lands on Beqa's west coast, which had just changed its name into Beqa Lagoon Resort (formerly Marlin Bay Hotel). After asking for confirmation from his *matanivanua* (ceremonial spokesperson), the Tui Sawau objected that he did not remember anybody asking him permission about such usage, which was referred to as "*ni kena vakayagataki na veiyaca e kilai kina na neitou vanua*" ([unauthorized] usage of names unique to our *vanua*). A former franchise lawyer, on a few other occasions I had ended up discussing with him, and members of the chiefly family, collective trade marks and collective marks protection (Pigliasco 2007a, 2009a, 2011).

We soon agreed that the Fijian concept of respect for things vakavanua (literally, in the manner of the land) resonates with western branding in the emphasis on geographical indication. That is, both in indigenous discourse and in western branding, goods are associated with localities or regions that

[18] Some Indo-Fijians practice thaumaturgic firewalking associated with rituals of self mutilation to overcome personal illness or a misfortune in the household. My interviews with Indo-Fijian firewalkers indicate that firewalking, a minor ritual in South and North Indian tradition (Sahadeo et al. 1974), was brought to Fiji during the 19th century by indentured Indian workers, devotees of the Divine Mother goddess Devi (also Dewa, Durga, or Shakti), who occasionally practiced religious penance to reunite with the Mother (see also Obeyesekere 1978).

are considered to have emblematic qualities and characteristics that they lend to their products.

The connection between the *vilavilairevo* ceremony practiced in Beqa and the Raiatean *umu tī* itself clearly suggests a pre-existing system of intellectual cultural property among Pacific Island peoples inseparable from their concept of identity. The Fijians, like other Pacific Islanders, had their own concept of cultural property, and have been "branding" themselves deliberately for centuries.

In accordance with the idea of respect, traditional priest *(tahua)* and Raiatean cultural custodian Tu-nui Arii-peu, who in January 1949 accepted an invitation to come to perform an *umu tī* at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, recognizes that the ceremony specifically belongs to the people from Beqa:

> The rite of fire-walking did not form a part of the older Polynesian culture. It was introduced about a hundred years ago from Fiji, and spread to many of the South Sea Islands. It appeared in Huahine, the chief's island, around 1850. (Kenn 1949:25)

Similarly, Fijian traditional priest and cultural custodian (*bete*) Apenisa Kuruiwaca acknowledges the reputation of places in Fiji as true "geographical indications." Apenisa, like any Fijian elder, acknowledges and respects the distinct custodianship of particular cultural elaborations traditionally belonging to other communities, like the "red prawns callers" in the island of Vatulele, the "turtle callers" in the island of Kadavu, and Koro, and the "*yawa* (mullet fish) callers" in Vanua Balavu:

> *Baleta na isolisoli qo sega wale ga ni tiko ga eke na isolisoli ni vilavilairevo, na vei yasai Viti e tu tale ga kina na vei isolisoli vaka oqo. E tu mai Vatulele, Kadavu, Koro, Vanua Balavu.*
>
> [This is because gifts like firewalking do not exist only here [Beqa], are manifest also in other parts of Fiji, such as Vatulele, Kadavu, Koro, Vanua Balavu.] (Apenisa Kuruiwaca, pers. comm.)

Well before contemporary prosaic marketing strategies started using tropical lands in the South Pacific to brand healthy foods and crystal water (Kaplan 2007), the Fijians used their ancestral *vanua* (land) to culturally distinguish themselves (see Crosby 1994). In Apenisa's account, specific *vanua* are epitomatically associated with the gift embedded in them. Harrison (2000) suggests that, in particular, ritual practices were treated as forms of property in precolonial Melanesia. However, in the case of the Naivilaqata priestly clan and of other groups in Fiji, cultural property is more about "custodianship" rather than "ownership." The Sawau people own a communal right over the *vilavilairevo*, which any descendent of the Naivilaqata clan can use under a fiduciary duty, a directly fiduciary responsibility towards their clan members, and indirectly towards the whole Sawau yavusa, involving both moral and economic rights, which are inevitably intertwined.

The growing efforts to market and brand the Fijian firewalking ceremony at the national and transnational levels fail to realize that "spirit matters;" thus, while you can rightfully brand theme parks and websites you cannot brand the unseen heritage embedded in the territory of a community unless you negotiate a permission with its custodians. The western concept of property treats culture as a possession, a commodity that can be transferred from one individual to another by means of a commercial transaction. The Sawau land, which includes both their tangible and intangible heritage, is a gift that ultimately belongs to God, and it is sacred (Tomlinson 2002, 2009). It is given to be held in trust for future generations, thus becoming a form of respect, stewardship, and custodianship, associated with an enduring sense of place (Nabobo-Baba 2006).

In this sense, custodianship is intertwined with mythological and kinship relationships, as well as law and community custodial responsibilities. In an essay entitled *Ritual as Intellectual Property*, Harrison notes a critical difference in rationale between western concepts of property and Melanesian ideas about the ownership of intangibles: a difference which echoes the distinction between commodities and gifts (Harrison 1992:234–5). Hence, whereas western intellectual property seeks to define products of human creativity that can be alienated from their creators, in Beqa among the Sawau, like in other traditional communities across the Pacific, the ownership of intangibles does not include the possibility of alienation, for "property is actually a form of sociality" (Harrison ibid.; see also Miller 2001).

Gregory (1982:212) observes that what distinguishes commodity from gift exchange is the conceptualization of kinship as a method of consumption. In the Sawau case, on the one hand, this gift exchange has become subjective and dependent on its commodification, objectifying the gift for the tourists. On the other hand, it is clearly creating relations between subjects exchanging aspects of themselves, when the gift is passed down within the Naivilaqata's lineage and allows other Sawau kindred from other clans to participate in the *vilavilairevo* performances and in the distribution of the earnings derived by those performances.

Conclusion

While in a commodity economy persons and things are reified (Jolly 1991:45), in a gift economy, persons and things are "personified": a process that makes people's relations "visible" (Strathern 1992:189). Paradoxically, taking the Maussian model to its limit, the gift is antagonistic to the commodity (Gregory 1982:640). Opposite to commodities, gifts diminish separateness (Lucas 2005:251), and in gift exchange "the community of exchange is likely

to be rather limited, contained within the ambit of the controlling social norms" (Rose 2005:410).

In contrast with the commodity, which can be exchanged with and alienated from anybody, in Beqa, as in several Pacific Island societies, the ownership of intangibles does not include the possibility of alienation. Toren (1999:32) observes that within a Fijian village people tend to privilege gift exchange over commodity exchange. What we would see as a commodity is made to take the form of market-inalienable gifts, strengthening the social capital and kin relations of community members, undermining the general categorical separation between gift and commodity (see Appadurai 1986).[19]

Although exogenous elements such as modernity, hybridization (Sahlins 2005; Young 1995), and commodification have affected pre-existing patterns of kinship, ownership, and property, in the case of the Sawau, *vilavilairevo* is actually a form of sociality to be interpreted more as custodianship. The Naivilaqata priestly clan's custodianship operates outside the logic of "possessive individualism" (Harrison 2000:676). Custodianship of their immaterial possession, the gift, allows the Naivilaqata priestly clan to create a sense of its social inalienable value through an enduring sense of place and relationship to the *vanua* and cultural symbols, which tourism cannot erode but merely reshape. To paraphrase Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:108), for the Naivilaqata clan members, branding their otherness has an undeniable impact on belonging.

It would therefore appear belittling if not detrimental to see the Sawau *dauvila* depicted as mere itinerant circus performers eroding meaningful dimensions of their culture. Through their cultural performance, the Sawau people are expressing "novel and hybrid concepts of personal, ethnic, national and transnational 'modern' identities'" (Silverman 2004:339; see also Burns 1994, de Burlo 1996; Sahlins 2005). In Beqa, indigenous entrepreneurial "empowerment," to draw on Comaroff's and Comaroff's (2009) research in post-colonial South Africa, is a tangible reality.

> In the post-colony, it [empowerment] connotes privileged access to market, money, and material enrichment. In the case of ethnic groups it is frankly associated with finding something essentially their own and theirs alone, something of their essence to sell. In other words, a brand. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:15)

On the other hand, drawing on Tomlinson (2004), I argue that the circulation of negative judgments about the *vilavilairevo*, accelerated by certain tourist media studies, as a "tourist trap," "phony folk culture," or a "pseudo-event" (Stymeist 1996:13; see also Wood 1997:16; Linnekin 1997:232; Stanley 1998:38), becomes a metacultural attempt to link entrepreneurial success to a

[19] Although talking of material "inalienable possessions," Both Miller's (2001) and Weiner's (1992) work could be relevant here, and also Radin's (1987) concept of "market-inalienability."

lack of "authenticity." For the Naivilaqata custodians, their gift is a testament to the powerful symbolic and collective meanings it continues to provide to them. It represents a process through which the past and aspects of their social life derived from the past are valorized in the present, where the tourist provides merely a new sort of audience (Lindstrom and White 1994), and a strategy of communal nourishment.

Following Schechner's (1988) lead, I observe that Fijian firewalking is not a transformation of theater into ritual, but a remarkable transformation of ritual into theater. In his critique of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), Bruner argues that performance is "constitutive," for every time heritage or tradition is enacted, it is given a new life, irrespective of where that enactment takes place (Bruner 2005:257). Therefore, the indigenous actors do not have to "rebrand" themselves, for despite a changed context, they clearly perceive socio-cultural continuity between the old and the new situation.[20]

Early colonists feared the indigenous Fijians would disappear completely unless cushioned from the harsh impact of market forces (Fraenkel and Firth 2007:3). Over more than two centuries, across Fiji's dramatic changes, the Naivilaqata's gift transformed itself into a utilitarian cultural elaboration, which, to borrow from Sahlins (2005:6), has consistently "indigenized the mana of the foreign," or in Jolly's (2005:138) words made "the foreign power indigenous." A dialogic affection for the colonial authority and a spiritual repositioning spared it from being outlawed. Perpetuating national stereotypes, the hybridization offered by the independent nation of Fiji first, and subsequently by the tourist industry, spared it from extinction. The gift received from the Naivilaqata's clan apical ancestor allowed its custodians to locally sustain their community, gain a reach and respect across the nation and beyond, and lastly, to intensify the group's social sentiment, moral integration, and exchange.

[20] Tourism's literature is replete with examples of local people interpreting novel situations in traditional terms and thus perceiving a continuity of cultural meaning which may escape the tourist-observer (Cohen 1988:383; Smith 1982:134; Goldberg 1983:488; Greenwood 1982:27; Errington and Gewertz 1989:51; Picard 1990:62).

Figure 7. *10 February 2005*
Firewalking "impresario" Peceli Vitukawalu holding a picture of Prince Charles (second right) on his visit to Rukua on 12 February 1974. Also visible are Peceli himself (first right) and Fiji's Deputy Prime Minister Ratu Penaia Ganilau (first left). Photo by the author.

CHAPTER 5

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL PROPERTY, TANGIBLE DATABASES, VISIBLE DEBATES: *THE SAWAU PROJECT*

> The creation or use of traditional cultural expressions outside the context of the cultural community may have a negative impact on that community in subtle yet destructive ways… Thus, a project like this one is helping the community in several ways: reclaiming intellectual property rights, revitalizing cultural practices, restoring its position in history by re-telling its own stories and repatriating customs and values.
>
> — Ro Mereani Tuimatanisiga (quoted in Pigliasco and Colatanavanua 2005)

Introduction

Since the very early 1990s, Pacific Island peoples have begun translating western legal ideas into local realities in order to pursue local struggles. At the same time, they have begun as well to assimilate new visual media forms to their own cultural and political concerns (see Ginsburg f.c.). Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin (2002, 9) have recently observed that debates about indigenous media reflect the "changing status of 'culture', which is increasingly objectified and mediated as it becomes a source of claims for political and human rights both nationally and on the world stage."

A former lawyer with an interest in *sui generis* regimes of protection of intangible cultural property, I arrived in Fiji in October 2004 puzzled by my recent reading of Brown's comments on the "Byzantine series of regulations" recommended by international bodies like UNESCO and WIPO (Brown 1998:203; see also 2003) to Pacific Island communities.[1] At the same time, other colleagues who had read Brown and were conducting research in Pacific Island societies were pointing out that removing indigenous peoples from the framework of international legislation may actually undermine their participation in the negotiation of an intellectual property (IP)-based

[1] Preliminary surveys in Fiji were conducted for two months in 1999 and 2002.

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sui generis system that creates new IP, or IP-like rights (see Geismar 2005, 2013, van Meijl 2009, Busse 2009, Moutu 2009, Recht 2009). Both my research conducted among the Sawau people on the island of Beqa in Fiji and at UNESCO in Paris demonstrated that three interconnected layers—local, national, and transnational—are dialogically engaged in establishing cultural property rights in Oceania (Pigliasco 2007a, 2011).

While doing research on Beqa, I became involved in *A Ituvatuva Ni Vakadidike E Sawau* (*The Sawau Project*), which began in November 2004 as a homework project assigned by five teachers at the Sawau District School of Dakuibeqa in Beqa. The initial goal of *The Sawau Project* was to identify what the pupils saw as important elements defining their own cultural heritage. Integrating cultural heritage projects into the school's curriculum was expected to stimulate the younger generation to become more interested in Fijian culture and language. Since then, *The Sawau Project* has grown to address both the inability of current intellectual property rights law to protect communally owned indigenous forms of cultural expression, and the need for indigenous peoples and their allies to negotiate and promote alternative forms of protection. In Hennessy's elegant words, "the project illustrates the complexity inherent in the mass-mediation of cultural heritage, as well as the revitalization and assertion of indigenous rights to self-representation in a post-colonial and national context" (2009, 91).

During my visits at the *Tabana Ni Vosa and iTovo Vakaviti Tabacakaca iTaukei* (Institute of Fijian Language and Culture) in Suva, I often heard that traditional custodians frequently requested the Institute to edit footage taken in their villages and collate it. In the course of my fieldwork, I had already collected many photographs, audio recordings, and action footage. I had shared these research materials with Sawau *yavusa* (tribe) members to elicit their comments. Watching those images on my camcorder screen around the kava bowl in Dakuibeqa, some of them suggested that my research material could be communally shared and collaboratively transformed into a unique representational genre.

The choice of a DVD format permitted the development of a multimedia, multivocal, multilinear tool with enormous storage capacity and a menu-driven narrative that would allow the viewer to choose from among a succession of images, providing quick access to different sections of a story map connected by hyperlinks to written texts and a topographic map of the island of Beqa.[2] Producing *The Sawau Project* consisted of showing, discussing,

[2] A one-minute prototype was created with help from the Media Centre of the University of the South Pacific. On behalf of the Sawau chiefly family, I took it to the Fiji Museum, the Media Centre of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community Office in Suva, and the Ministry of Information, Communications and Media Relations. The Institute of Fijian Language and Culture expressed interest in the project; it was then promptly endorsed by the Ministry of

and creating a montage of images according to community feedback on their appropriateness. Felix Colatanavanua, a cousin of the Sawau Paramount Chief, was involved in every aspect of the creation of this montage: choosing and editing the footage, adding his own photos and animating them to convey linguistic and extralinguistic cues, editing the musical arrangements—generously facilitated by the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture—and building the DVD's multilinear interface.[3]

The project grew out of the Sawau tribe responsibility for its cultural heritage—specifically the *vilavilairevo* (firewalking) ceremony. This responsibility is embedded in a continuing relationship between the people, their *vanua* (land) and other traditional and cultural resources. In this relationship, the land, like the *vilavilairevo*, is a gift that ultimately belongs to God but has been given to the people to be held in trust for future generations (Pigliasco 2007a, f.c.). Custodianship is associated with an enduring sense of place and relationship to the village. The Sawau people share collective responsibility toward their traditional knowledge and expressions of culture (TKEC), just as their identity is philosophically vested in communalism and intertwined with their mythological and kin relationships.

On Beqa, cultural, religious, social, and economic relations have become more global over time through integration of markets and the rapid spread of technologies, which are redefining concepts of identity, branding, public domain, and the legitimacy of international institutions, reflecting a hierarchy of power at the international level and the impact that legal regulation of traditional cultural expressions has on the globalized legal system itself (Pigliasco f.c.).[4] The application of legal practices and concepts to traditional cultural expressions has challenged modern law to recognize new forms of property.

Fijian Affairs, Culture and Heritage in conjunction with the Cultural Mapping Programme. Felix Colatanavanua and I were giving given access to the Institute's equipment and software to edit the DVD. The editing started in May 2005 and continued till October 2005.

[3] Felix Colatanavanua envisioned how to visually represent the Sawau heritage. He had returned from living in Canada, where he had been working in film production, about the same time I arrived in Beqa. *The Sawau Project* intersected with his desire, and that of his mother, the Tui Sawau's sister Ro Mereani Tuimatanisiga (also recently returned from England), to take up responsibility for their people and the land. Ro Mereani Tuimatanisiga's speech in Fijian language opens the five minute video introduction.

[4] The Fijian firewalking ceremony (*vilavilairevo*) traditionally performed only by members of the Naivilaqata priestly clan (*bete*) of the Sawau tribe on the island of Beqa, is a prime example of a propitiation ritual that has become commodified to suit the requirements of tourism. The reproduction of tradition on Beqa is currently being shaped by social processes such as globalization and commodification. Simulated and spurious *vilavilairevo* performances along with new forms of misappropriation and misrepresentation are accompanying the tourism industry's rapid developments in Fiji (see Pigliasco 2011a).

Like the Sawau tribe of Beqa Island with their *vilavilairevo* performances, the Sa speakers from the south of Pentecost Island accommodate westernization and maintain their *kastom* identity through touristic performances of *nagol* (land dive), which is a demonstration of tradition as well as a potent ethnic marker (De Burlo 1996). In the *nagol* jump case, a group of applicants from Pentecost Island tried to prevent the respondents from performing the *nagol* jump on the island of Santo, claiming that the Santo performance was an appropriation of the Pentecost performance. In July 1992, the Chief Justice of Vanuatu, basing his decision on "substantial justice" and "in conformity with custom," ordered that the *nagol* performance should be repatriated to Pentecost, from whence it came (Lindstrom 1994:69–70).[5]

The *nagol* jump case in Vanuatu when juxtaposed to the Sawau's situation in Fiji holds tremendous interest because it raises a question on the extent to which the rights relating to traditional cultural expressions—as granted by custom to certain members of the clan or tribe—are recognized by national legislation, and thus can be easily enforced (see Lucas-Schloetter 2004). In Fiji, the issues of intangible cultural property, intangible cultural heritage, and commodification have recently re-emerged at local, national, regional, and transnational levels with Fiji's ongoing *Na ituvatuva ni kilaka itaukei kei na kena matanataki* (literally, National Inventory on Traditional Fijian Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Project, currently referred to as the "Cultural Mapping Programme"), Fiji's pending Act to Protect the Indigenous Intellectual Property Rights in Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Bill which adapts the Pacific Model Law (2002), and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 2003. In other words, indigenous groups are drawing on the resources of a global civil society to reconstitute themselves as "traditional communities" and retain their creativity and dynamism (Geismar 2005, Kurin 2004, Robins 2003, Sahlins 1999, Silverman 2004).

One of my immediate concerns upon my arrival in Fiji, was that despite the emerging interest at local, regional, and transnational levels in documenting cultural expressions and saving them in databases, indigenous communities are rarely the ones responsible for compiling such databases and holding the rights. The ongoing *The Sawau Project*, discussed in this article as a case study in the participatory, collaborative production of a DVD, shows how the Sawau community of Beqa, like the Sa people from Pentecost Island in Vanuatu, fundamentally aims for "control over representation" (Hennessy 2009, 91).[6]

[5] In: *Re the Nagol Jump, Assal and Vatu v. Council of Chiefs of Santo* (1980–1994) Van LR 545.

[6] See the recent online multivocal ethnographic project initiated by anthropologists Thorolf Lipp and Martina Kleinert in collaboration with the Sa people from Bunlap, Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, www.ursprung-in-der-suedsee.de.

The project allows the community to re-contextualize their traditional knowledge and expressions of culture to address present concerns like those offered by the Cultural Mapping Programme, the pending legislation reflected in revisions of the Pacific Model Law, and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Local Knowledge, Global Commons

A central issue of intellectual property rights is delimiting the boundaries of property interest embodied in immaterial *res*. Due to the creation of innovative commons such as the Internet, there has been increased discourse on "free culture" that falls outside the realm of intellectual property. It is commonly argued that it is in the interest of the general public to lift embargos on the free flow of information in order to stimulate research and creativity and increase economic growth (Lessig 2004). These views exacerbate an imbalance of power over property rights for indigenous peoples such as the Sawau who are struggling to retain control and protect the use of their traditional cultural expressions. Sawau cultural expressions are inalienable possessions freely circulating among their custodians, but outside their society, they exemplify an enclosed domain.

Indeed, holders of traditional knowledge and cultural property are concerned by the new ways the amorphous public domain creates an incentive for free access to cultural material unprotected by intellectual property rights. Anyone may then misappropriate, copy, or perform intangible cultural expressions of which they are not the owners. The goal of self-determination includes the possibility that indigenous people are not particularly longing to be part of this global commons. The public domain may impoverish or annihilate their concept of cultural property "because it defines traditional knowledge as a freely available resource" (Brown 2003:237). The public domain is a form of "nonproperty" that negatively affects the lives of indigenous people such as the Sawau today.

A limited term of protection, or no protection at all, means that most indigenous cultural expressions and works end up in the public domain even if their creators are able to demonstrate that such expressions date far back in time. In most traditional communities, knowledge is acquired over time and passed on from one generation to the next. It keeps evolving and changing character. Therefore, it is difficult to establish *when* such knowledge was actually discovered or created and *when* it entered the public domain. Once it enters the public domain, however, anyone is free to reproduce it.

In *Free Culture*, Lessig argues that the Internet "has unleashed extraordinary possibilities for many to participate in the process of building and cultivating culture that reaches far beyond local boundaries" (2004, 9). Boyle (2003)

argues that a few centuries ago indigenous songs, dances, performances, rituals, and ideas did not need any intellectual property protection since people maintained "physical control" over their heritage. However, after the Internet was invented, indigenous people began to have to apply the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, the No Electronic Theft Act, The Sonny Bono Term Extension Act, and even the Collections of Information Antipiracy Act to protect their cultural property (Boyle 2003, 42).

The Internet has made it easier to obtain unauthorized reproductions of traditional knowledge and cultural expressions, provide unofficial fixations of live performances, and adapt and commercialize TKEC without sharing economic benefits with their cultural custodians; also, it has made it easier to misappropriate traditional words, stories, symbols, and distinctive signs, and use TKEC in culturally and spiritually offensive and degrading ways, often without acknowledging the traditional source of these creations or innovations. The Internet may be touted as the greatest example of democracy ever invented by humankind, but, as Lessig (2004) notes, it has no capacity to punish those who steal cultural property from others.

Coombe (2003, 1181) suggests that a *cultural* public domain requires us to "consider a wider range of activities and practices than those that copyright law traditionally recognized as acts of authorship and those most characteristic of Western creators." More recently, she observes that the cultural survival of peoples demands that we formulate new principles governing the use of "cultural heritage" to ensure the conditions necessary to foster diverse forms of cultural creativity (Coombe 2005, 35). Whereas western laws represent a system of perpetual creativity in which people own for a period of time whatever they create, customary practices suggest a system of perpetual ownership where people create what they own. Creativity functions to perpetuate the transfer of ownership of TKEC (Strathern 2001).

Economies such as that of the Sawau require a constant investment in physical and abstract labor (creativity), as people strive to add value to their cultural product (Leach 2004, 154, 162). Therefore, commodification is not perforce the enemy of authenticity and cultural heritage. Sawau performers dialogically negotiate and interpret novel situations in traditional terms, while perceiving a continuity of cultural meaning. Elsewhere (Pigliasco 2007a, f.c.), I have pointed out that tourism's literature is replete with examples of local people interpreting novel situations in traditional terms and thus perceiving a continuity of cultural meaning that may escape the tourist-observer.

A Sui Generis *Proposal*

The western copyright doctrine presents myriad obstacles to the full protection of indigenous expressions of culture. Geographic Indications, Trademarks, Certification and Authentication Marks such as the Māori *Toi-Iho*, and indigenous Labels of Authenticity are certainly signs of progress and generate pride in local communities, but remain mere "add-ons."[7] They can be used to educate the public about indigenous art and culture, but they cannot stop imitations from being made. On the other hand, Fijians, like other Pacific Islanders, have had their own concepts of "identity," "branding," and "intellectual property" for centuries. Close to the pan-Fijian concept of respect for the land and customs, *vakavanua* (literally, the way of the land), are the Western geographical indications entailing a form of branding (Pigliasco f.c.). Several landmark cases in the Pacific region recognize a pre-existing system of law among indigenous peoples inseparable from the concept of "identity."[8]

These cases also suggest that neglected non-western epistemologies may provide us with new concepts and modes of organizing and protecting TKEC. Fiji's prospective Act to Protect the Indigenous Intellectual Property Rights in Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Bill, currently under its nineteenth revision, is an IP-based *sui generis* system which creates new IP-like rights for cultural heritage. The bill will protect TKEC against illicit use normally protected by copyright law. It will give exclusive rights to traditional owners and custodians who will then be able to authorize or prevent others from undertaking certain acts in relation to their TKEC. It will also establish a Code of Ethics in relation to use of TKEC. That is, traditional owners and custodians, such as the Sawau, will hold moral rights to their TKEC.

The Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Bill is reflected in revisions of the Model Law on Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture (hereafter Pacific Model Law), initiated by the South Pacific Community and developed under the aegis of UNESCO and WIPO. It is derived from the Regional Framework for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture conceived in February 1999 in Noumea at the Symposium on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Traditional and Popular Indigenous Cultures in the Pacific Islands, which brought together representatives from twenty-one states and territories of the South Pacific region. On that occasion, Māori scholar

[7] The *Toi-Iho* certification mark has been registered by Creative NZ, a New Zealand government agency that intends to eventually transfer it to a Māori-run body (Maui Solomon, pers. comm.).

[8] Compare *Mabo and Others v. Queensland* ([No 2] (1992) 175 CLR 1); *Wik Peoples v. Queensland* (1996 187 CLR 1).

Aroha Te Pareake Mead emphasized the need to develop a specific, *sui generis,* regional legal framework for the Pacific. Unlike western intellectual property rights legislation, it should be designed to incorporate ancestral customs and rules in protecting all aspects of traditional knowledge and culture (Aroha Mead, pers. comm.).[9] This instrument would establish for the first time in the Pacific region new communal, perpetual, inalienable, and exclusive traditional and moral cultural rights, related to but distinct from intellectual property rights.[10]

The approach taken by the Pacific Model Law is to legislate traditional and moral rights over traditional knowledge and expressions of culture which previously might have been regarded as part of the public domain. Once the state classifies TKEC as a segment of its own public domain, it is able to control its usage.[11] From the beginning, Pacific Islanders interested in protecting TKEC debated whether to follow western legal models or establish a new system based on how traditional cultural custodians conceived of ownership and protection. Increasingly, stakeholders called for indigenous models of protection of their TKEC, as exemplified in the Mataatua Declaration in New Zealand, the Julayinbul Statement on Indigenous Intellectual Property Rights in Australia, and the Paoakalani Declaration in Hawai'i. Such indigenous declarations of cultural rights, like intellectual property rights conventions, are often nonbinding, unenforceable "soft laws."[12]

Currently under revision in Fiji, Vanuatu, Palau, and Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Model Law represents a major advance in contributing to the international rights discussion without incurring a procedural uniformity that threatens cultural diversity (Pigliasco 2009). The Pacific Model Law provides a hybrid national and regional approach. It establishes a regional legislative framework, but leaves matters of implementation to policy-makers in accordance with their national laws and systems. The Pacific Model Law encourages the inclusion of customary law and traditional governance systems in national legislation over cultural property rights. It recognizes that the

[9] "Dialogue on Pacific Experiences and Perspectives on the Use and Ownership of Genes" (Call of The Earth Llamado de la Tierra, 6–8 June 2005, Suva).

[10] Defined by the Regional Framework for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture at Part 3(13).

[11] This is similar to the imposition of domaine public payant, the French concept requiring a payment of royalties for the use of literary and musical works in the public domain, advocated in the 1976 Tunis Model Law.

[12] "Soft laws" often do not establish the terms of protection or provide any protection against unauthorized performance or fixation, reproduction, or broadcasting and other communication to the public of traditional cultural forms (e.g., Rome Convention, 1961). They may be vague in referring to unspecified "works of folklore" (e.g., Art. 15(4) of the Berne Convention, 1967) and fail to protect the moral rights of the authors while contributing to commodification of cultural property (e.g., TRIPS, Art. 2.1; 14.1; 39. 3).

traditional custodians of TKEC should remain the primary decision-makers regarding the use of TKEC, following their customary forms of protection. It thus ensures that the creativity and innovation found in traditional cultures will continue to benefit local communities. While the content of Fiji's nineteenth revision of the Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Bill remains confidential, there is an indication that the legislature has been evaluating the establishment of a Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions Authority. This would consist of a Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions Council and a Resource and Clearance Centre for TKEC composed of a chairman and four or five recognized holders of TKEC that may meet at least four times a year. The members would be appointed by the minister, in consultation with the Bose Levu Vakaturaga (Great Council of Chiefs) for a term of three years, and would be eligible for re-appointment for one other term only.

Fiji's Tangible Template

The Cultural Mapping Programme was started in May 2005 by the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture "to effectively police the Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Bill, at whose root is the preservation and maintenance of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture, with its requirements of consent from the traditional owners of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture for non-customary purposes" (Sipiriano Nemani, pers. comm.). The Cultural Mapping Programme takes the form of a database system, using a computer application in Fijian language that was specifically designed for the project by a local software company. The database contains text, images, and video and audio recordings, representing "the first indigenous knowledge database ever compiled in the country" (Sipiriano Nemani, pers. comm.). Given the issue of confidentiality in both the cultural mapping process and the resulting database, the Inventory has not been put online or made accessible to persons outside the indigenous Fijian community. The viewing of this database is restricted to senior officers of the Institute. However, in order to make the information available for general public viewing and usage, custodians would have to be informed and their consent sought. Information will only be available to custodians of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture, their tribe, clan, and family members, upon the initial approval of informants (traditional owners) (Sipiriano Nemani, pers. comm.).

In fact, "in Fiji's database, the people are still the traditional owners, and are still the creators and makers. The Institute [Institute of Fijian Language and Culture] is acting only as a facilitator. Fiji's Cultural Mapping Programme offers *sui generis* protection measures in lieu of western intellectual property law and treats TKEC as communal property" (Sipiriano Nemani, pers. comm.).

Moreover, once the Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Bill becomes law, "collections and databases of traditional cultural expressions will receive *sui generis* protection not only over how traditional cultural expressions are expressed, but also over the content and ideas represented by those expressions" (Sipiriano Nemani, pers. comm.).

While the Institute's recommended guidelines for cultural research policy in Fiji were recently adopted as a "template" by all the Pacific Island nations involved in cultural mapping processes (Ralph Regenvanu, pers. comm.), the Institute director, Misiwaini Qereqeretabua points out the enormous challenges of mapping the 1,179 villages scattered in the fifteen provinces that compose Fiji and the island of Rotuma, each one with its own distinct local knowledge and cultural system. On top of government funding constraints, the Cultural Mapping Programme is encountering a series of difficulties:

> Disputes between members of the local communities regarding ownership… The mentality of most Fijian villagers is focused more on monetary gains rather than cultural safeguarding and revitalization. Hence it is often difficult to convince them to take up the initiative themselves, considering an apathetic youthful population in local communities… Often villages are less enthusiastic about the initiative… More than often there were signs of non-interest shown by communities of traditional holders for they see no economic benefit. (Qereqeretabua 2008, 6)

The Sawau Project

Free from the obstacles of the Cultural Mapping Programme, such as "miscommunication within the Fijian administration, delays in approval of requests from Finance, and slow processes for release of quarterly grants" (Sipiriano Nemani, pers. comm.), the initial goal of *The Sawau Project* has been to record and protect important elements of the Sawau's cultural heritage in ways that the community has decided upon.

The Sawau Project is a "story map" that grounds its navigational architecture in the geography of Beqa itself, allowing viewers to scroll and select their path through the cultural data assembled. Indigenous knowledge and culture is scattered in the minds of many members of a community, but rarely collected in the form of a map, hence they are quite difficult to envision. The story map becomes a locus where Sawau villages, cultural sites, and memories are reclaimed and safeguarded.

With the consent of the Tui Sawau (Paramount Chief of the Sawau tribe) and the Sawau clan members, the goal of *The Sawau Project* became to prevent misuse, misinterpretation, and misconception of the Sawau's cultural

heritage (mainly the *vilavilairevo* firewalking ceremony).[13] The audio-visual documents of *The Sawau Project* remain in Fijian language and are open only to the members of the Sawau community and researchers who have obtained joint permission from the head of the Naivilaqata priestly clan and the *Tabana Ni Vosa kei iTovo Vakaviti* (Institute of Fijian Language and Culture). This creative work of digital media was intentionally designed for minimal circulation and shown in limited academic contexts. A growing number of indigenous groups are using the Internet to archive their written and visual records, vanquishing the old stereotype of the "lost tribe" standing passively in the face of the overwhelming forces of modernity (Wilson and Stewart 2008, 21, 30; see also Christen 2005).

The Sawau Project could have been made broadly available on the Internet from the very beginning. However, Sawau members felt they would not be able to control how other people might appropriate their images, resulting in negative consequences for the community. While funding, connectivity, and digital access are definitely also issues to be considered, it seems like any determination of the group's specific needs with regard to the Internet approach to the project should wait at least until Fiji's Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Bill becomes an enforceable law.

Implications of The Sawau Project

Over the last two decades, indigenous uses of new technologies have grown out of the emergence of a global politics of indigeneity, a boom in cultural tourism, and debates over what constitutes and who owns intellectual property and cultural knowledge (Christen 2005; Gregory 2006). Formerly, indigenous peoples relied on oral transmission to communicate and conserve their ideals, morals, and stories. Indigenous media producer, Jeremy Torrie, argues that "kept among blood relations, such a mechanism for maintaining traditional knowledge is ingenious, portable, and indestructible, unless the community that holds the knowledge is wiped out" (Torrie 2005, 16). Folklore and performance studies scholars argue that new measures intended to conserve, safeguard, and sustain non-western cultural practices actually objectify and isolate them. They risk freezing practices that were formerly mutable (Brown 2003, 2005; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). However, *The Sawau Project*'s use of new media—paralleled by recent digital archiving

[13] In addition to the *vilavilairevo*, a visual document of the legendary fish drive (*qoli kubu*) performed by the fishermen clan (*gonedau*) of the Sawau tribe on special occasions, is temporarily inserted in the video introduction. In May 2009, additional footage was taken in Dakuibeqa to document the process of making of the new fishing net (*lawa*).

projects in Australia and North and South America—shows that people can reach selectively into their pasts to open paths to a dynamic future (Christen 2005, 318; Clifford 2004, 23; Graham 2005, 625).

The Sawau Project is an ever unfolding, open-ended project. In Ginsburg's words, the beauty and value of these media are *extratextual*, "created by the cultural and social processes they mediate, embody, create, and extend" (Ginsburg 1994, 370, quoted in Hennessy 2009, 91). It encourages further research and offers the opportunity for the entire Sawau community to participate by adding more photographs and information about their heritage. Thus, it does not freeze culture in a historic moment, as in a fixed medium such as a book or a film. "Cultural mapping" becomes not just a way for displaying spatial human cognition, but a fundamental tool for communicating awareness on managing indigenous resources and the protection of both tangible and intangible indigenous cultural heritage. Such cultural heritage projects allow control over the creative process and distribution of TKEC.

While I cannot disagree with Hennessy that the use of a tripod would have certainly "elevated the DVD viewing experience" (Hennessy 2009, 91), *The Sawau Project* shows that new methodologies can be created to meet the demand for social intervention *in situ* to preserve traditional forms and symbols. *The Sawau Project* is not a "disappearing world" documentary where the anthropologist is a consultant to a television crew and the social intervention lies in educating foreigners about an exotic culture or evoking empathy through glamorous ethnographic filmmaking (Banks and Morphy 1997). The project aims to telescope Sawau's heritage, encouraging a *sui generis* protection. Not a documentary, but merely a montage of documents, the project creates an inventory of sites, stories, and shared memories of the Sawau people. *The Sawau Project* listens to the native agenda, allows local control, and allows for the dynamic and metacultural nature of the intangible cultural heritage it records. *The Sawau Project* represents a "crossover" between applied visual and legal anthropology, a form of social intervention *in situ*, a *sui generis* approach to intangible cultural property strategies for positive protection, and a reflexive tool to encourage research capability, pedagogical visual methodologies, and linkages and institutional collaborations among Fijian communities (see Pigliasco 2007b).

My experience assisting and observing the team of native researchers involved in the Cultural Mapping Programme suggests that they are facing quite a challenging task in creating enough intellectual and emotional distance between themselves and their own culture (see Clifford 1997; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). The "insider" researcher has to be just as ethical and respectful, reflexive, and critical as the "outsider" researcher. The insider may receive even less pardon for any faux pas than the outsider (see Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). "Collaboration in its various forms is now a necessity" (Lassiter 2005, 74). Despite the fact that I and two "westernized" members of the chiefly

family had been behind the project, and that it was endorsed by the Sawau Paramount Chief himself and sponsored by the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture, watching the Sawau members' enthusiastic responses led me to believe that the project was not informed by the "hegemonic" ruling elite. *The Sawau Project* is not an apotheosis of chiefdom, but a celebration of traditional customs using digital technology.

To the Sawau people, the images contained in *The Sawau Project* represent something more than just a legal tool. They brought to life the awareness of the passage of time, the weight of their grandfathers, and a new self-consciousness. Participants became spectators of their own social narratives and aesthetic dramas. Most of them had never been behind the camera "Navajo style" and had not taken part in the cultural mapping process. However, while viewing the DVD, these social actors became agents as they raised concerns about fundamental ideas and codes of their culture (Geertz 1973). The project is not part of a social revolution, either, since Fijian villagers are not plagued by any form of "social oppression." Instead, the project is a response to external pressures: dominant hegemonic forces and agents of change and distortion, such as the Methodist and Pentecostal churches and the tourism industry. Only time will provide a conclusive answer regarding the impact of *The Sawau Project*, since it was designed to be continued.

What I believe is the real challenge, however, is to follow the agency, architecture, and effects of the three layered flow of legal ideas *associated* with traditional knowledge and cultural expressions in light of Fiji's troubled present and past. The recent developments of December 5, 2006, show that the rule of law along with customary laws and the centrality of chiefly authority in Fiji are at stake, or collapsed. The burden on chiefs and on the stakeholders in the digital era and modern day Fiji is greater than ever before. The December *coup d'état*, the fourth in Fiji, is not just a single event about political or economic power. Rather, like other conflicts elsewhere in the Pacific and in the world, it is a transformative process rooted in contested views of the past, critically forcing the local actors toward compromises and renegotiations in their conceptions of their tradition, identity, and heritage in the light of new democratic and constitutional needs.

Riles observes that one of the immediate concerns of Fiji's first governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, was "the degree and measure in which native laws and customs should be preserved in force, and how far English law should be at once generally introduced" (Gordon quoted in Riles 2003:193). In Gordon's words, the danger is that the common law "would degrade the chiefs and render them idle" (Riles 2003:194). Fiji's proposed "dual" IP system, composed of a *sui generis* legislation side by side with a Copyright Act may vaguely remind us of the "Native Code" based on Fijian customary law, in addition to the common law envisioned by Gordon more than one hundred and thirty years ago; however, there is hope that safeguarding heritage policies in Fiji

and in Oceania not only reinforces the idea that cultural property is a human right, but reveals that self-development and self-determination, in a different way than in the past, are central to issues of cultural representation.

Figure 8. *4 May 2005*
Naviti Resort, Coral Coast, Viti Levu. A group of firewalkers from Dakuibeqa chiefly village posing with Australian tourists after the show. Photo by the author.

CHAPTER 6

THE SAWAU PROJECT GOES SOCIAL, OR, THE UNEXPECTED DILEMMAS OF THE DIGITAL AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

> The logic of Enlightenment in the Western tradition justifies the abandonment of traditional distinctions by robbing the past of its authority and refocusing the societal vision on the future—a future governed by rationality and science, gilded by promises of prosperity and progress.
>
> — Andrew Arno (2002:217)

Introduction

In the spring of 2005, blurring the line between academic and advocate (and former attorney), I worked with the Sawau community of Beqa, an island iconic in Fiji for its firewalking practice (*vilavilairevo*), to design and facilitate the development of *The Sawau Project* (*A Ituvatuva Ni Vakadidike E Sawau*; Pigliasco and Colatanavanua 2005),[1] a multimedia digital storytelling limited distribution DVD supported by a grant from the iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture in Suva (IILC), formerly known as the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture.[2] Not a documentary per se, but a montage of documents, the project created an archive of sites, stories, and shared memories

[1] The 2005 *The Sawau Project* DVD has never been publicly available. The master copy is archived at the iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture (IILC) in Suva. However, the Sawau community has decided to create a Facebook page whose content is under evaluation. It is scheduled to go online in spring 2015, marking the project's tenth anniversary. While my research is still in progress, this paper is merely and tentatively outlining some of the process's general issues, genesis, and potential caveats and workarounds.

[2] On June 30, 2010, the Cabinet approved a Ministry of Fijian Affairs Decree that replaced the words "Fijian" or "indigenous" or "indigenous Fijian" with the word "iTaukei" in all written laws and all official documentation and public offices when referring to the original and native settlers of Fiji. http://www.fijianaffairs.gov.fj/iTaukei.html

Guido Carlo Pigliasco, *Custodians of the Gift*. ©2020 Firenze University Press. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania symposium "The Pacific Islands in the Digital Age," organized by Geoffrey Hobbis and Alan Howard, and held in San Diego, CA on 11 February 2016.

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of the Sawau people, recognizing that collaboration is a vehicle through which knowledge, understandings, and visual representations are produced. In an insightful review of the project, Hennessy observes that "within a historical dynamic that privileged the colonizer as documentarian and representative of the colonized, this project signifies a postcolonial reversal, allowing the Sawau tribe to reappropriate images of the *vilavilairevo* that situate and represent its relation to their colonial history on their own terms, 'restoring its position in history by retelling its own stories' for their own communities" (2009a:91).

When I returned to the chiefly village of Dakuibeqa three years later in 2008, I was somewhat surprised that among the usual requests from my host family and close friends, they were asking for more copies of the DVD of *The Sawau Project*. Soon after my arrival in the village, on a rainy weekend night, thirty or so Sawau men and women were sitting on the floor of Taitusi Vakatawase's house in front of a small TV screen drinking kava and loudly exchanging jokes while rewinding over and over the segments contained in the DVD. At that time, Dakuibeqa was still the most isolated Sawau village, deep in the south of Beqa Island, with no TV—except for Taitusi's satellite dish-equipped one—and poor cellular reception even from the ubiquitous Digicel that had just entered Fiji's mobile market.

Those of us who do research within communities often face the problem of how to turn orally transmitted memories into written or audiovisual representations. But, in fact, we are even more involved: we become part of a community's cultural memory itself due to our actions—what we do and what we do not do (Pigliasco and Lipp 2011:373–6). In October 2004, IILC was about to launch a program for cultural mapping at the national level. Cultural project managers Sipiriano Nemani, at that time with IILC, and Meretui Ratunabuabua, at that time with the Department of Culture and Heritage, strongly influenced my decision to start a community-based project that could become a pilot for other communities' heritage mapping projects in Fiji. In March 2005, IILC confirmed its interest in the project. Spiritually and financially supported by the recent UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, IILC was just about to take on the role of guardian, protector, and advocate of iTaukei indigenous Fijians' cultural heritage.

Despite the emerging local, regional, and transnational interest in documenting cultural expressions and saving them in databases, indigenous communities are rarely the ones who compile such databases and hold the rights (Pigliasco 2009). Back in 2005, *Ratu* (chiefly title) Felix Colatanavanua co-editor of *The Sawau Project* and I shared similar concerns. To find a suitable way for the whole community to access *The Sawau Project*, allowing both of us to receive more feedback and allowing Sawau members to continue to record, share, and safeguard their stories, photos, and videos. We were fortunate because Felix, who had worked in video productions in Canada,

was able to design a multimedia, multivocal, multilinear tool with a menu-driven narrative that allowed viewers to choose from among a succession of images, providing quick access to different sections of a *story map* connected by hyperlinks to written texts and a topographic map of Beqa Island.[3] Felix became involved in every aspect of creating this montage: choosing and editing footage, adding and animating his own photos to convey linguistic and extralinguistic cues, editing the musical arrangements, and building the DVD's multilinear interface. Last but not least, he envisioned the story map grounded in the geography of Beqa itself, where viewers of the DVD could select their paths of assembled cultural data through a scroll-down menu.

Our initial premise was that the DVD's interactive story map should be a locus where all six Sawau villages and Sawau cultural sites and memories are reclaimed and safeguarded. The problem is that indigenous knowledge and culture are scattered in the minds of many members of a community, but are rarely collected in visual form and thus can be very difficult to envision and assemble. Plus, we weren't sure *how*, as only Felix had the know-how, and until a few years ago nobody in Dakuibeqa other than Felix owned a laptop. Adding a more personal predicament, my previous work on a film-documentary in the shark callers' Kontu Village in New Ireland (Pigliasco and Francalanci 1994) had planted several bugs in my head about "truth," "objectivity," and "our control" over images (Pigliasco and Lipp 2011).[4] After a modest local success, and a couple of interviews broadcast on Fiji 1 TV and published in the Fiji Sun Weekender, despite our efforts to improve the existing project and re-scale it for wider uptake by Sawau community members on Beqa, in Fiji, and outside Fiji, we were technically and theoretically at a dead end.

[3] In fall 2004, I hired Laisiasa Cavakiqali, a brilliant student of Susanne Pohler in the Marine Studies Programme of the University of the South Pacific (USP) with outstanding topographic skills. Laisiasa spent the two-month Christmas break with his brother in the nearby Naceva village, half an hour's walk from Dakuibeqa, assisting us and the Sawau community in our cultural re-mapping activity. Equipped with two GPS trackers lent to us by the Department of Geology at USP and the Fiji Museum, guided by the spatial knowledge of the elders, with Felix, his mother Ro Mereani Tuimatanisiga, and Sawau community teams, we engaged in a participatory re-tracing and re-learning of the Sawau cultural heritage. Google Earth was only launched two years after *The Sawau Project*, so we had to rely upon a sketch map of the island drawn using satellite imagery provided by the Department of Geology at USP. Hiking throughout the island enhanced the community's research capability to re-track the important cultural heritage sites and landmarks re-emerging from the narratives (*italanoa*) of the Sawau mythical and historical past.

[4] While a reference to this work has been added to the bibliography, the film documentary director Susanna Francalanci and I, not sharing the views of the RTI Mediaset production, declined to have authorship or copyright to it. Both our names were duly removed from the final cut.

Interconnection is everything in the global digital age. As Inda and Rosaldo (2008:33–35) observe, however, in a world of intricate flows and interconnections, the flows are not omnipresent and the connections are not uniform. The world is not a seamless whole without boundaries. While commodities drift briskly from one locality to another, ideologies require a different infrastructure in order to move. Such is the complex world of globalization in which global networks provide unbounded opportunities. This paper summarizes some of the epistemological dilemmas that the Sawau community and possibly other indigenous communities in Oceania are facing in the process of regaining possession of the institutionalized authority that museums and heritage organizations have achieved, in order to act as custodians of their own past.

From Hypermedia to Social Media

With the tenth anniversary of *The Sawau Project* looming, Felix and I were yet undecided on its progression and future. Fighting the dilemma of "the incursion of the foreign" exposed by Lawrence Venuti (1998:10; see also Bacchilega 2007), and trying to act as a mere "translator of culture" in this new media environment, I sent Felix a note via Facebook Messenger suggesting that *The Sawau Project* "version 1.0" should rely on new digital technologies, opening new social spaces and creating new forms of knowledge and community.

Version 1.0 of the Sawau multimedia DVD starts with opening credits that automatically load to a screen with an interlocutory menu. A series of clickable commands prompt the user to open a five-minute visual introduction. Another clickable command opens on an aerial image of Beqa Island with a superimposed scroll-down list of the six Sawau villages and cultural sites never before recorded on a topographic map of the island. Clicking on any of them allows the user to virtually "land" at the exact topographic location calculated during our mapping surveys. This first-generation multimedia format allows the integration of animated photographs, film clips, digital stories, audio narratives, and songs to maximize the user's experience for each site: Naiseuseu (village), Dakuibeqa (village), Dakuni (village), Soliyaga (village), Rukua (village), Naceva (village), Malovo (cultural site), Nacurumoce (cultural site), Navakaisese (cultural site), Naitukutuku (cultural site), Namoliwai (cultural site), and Vagadra (cultural site). Several historic and heritage sites (Namaca, Nabau, Nailomo) for which some audio memories had already been collected were deliberately not included in version 1.0 for lack of material. Images of other sites (Navakaisese, Naitukutuku, Rukua) need to be corrected and enriched. Several others are yet to be re-discovered in the memories and *italanoa* (tales) of the Sawau people, and eventually mapped.

Perhaps the most inspired move we could have made—which also would have been the easiest way to transpose indigenous thinking into digital media to "put a new face" on the ethnographic material in my possession (see Faulhaber and Forline 2008:253)—would have been to actually link *The Sawau Project* to Fiji's Cultural Mapping Digital Database for Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture (the "Database" hereafter). After all, *The Sawau Project* was born as a pilot project supported by a grant from IILC while the Database was in development.

In 2005, IILC launched *Na ituvatuva ni kilaka itaukei kei na kena matanataki*, a national inventory of indigenous Fijian traditional knowledge and expressions of culture currently referred to as the "Cultural Mapping Programme," which borrows and simultaneously subverts ideas of ethnological collection and colonial practice. From its inception, cultural mapping in Fiji promised to be more than just creating an inventory of cultural sites, cultural rituals, and traditional knowledge, as its process involves consultation, assessment, and information gathering.[5] Realizing that a total reliance on superimposed model laws and transnational convention would be insufficient to resolve core issues of identification of cultural heritage ownership, Fiji policymakers introduced the idea of first having in place an ad hoc, Fijian-language digital database of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture, shifting the focus from economic to social capital; in other words, establishing links between digital and social relationships.

As in the case of Solomon Islands, as presented by Lawrence Foana′ota and Geoffrey White, the project obviously had to face and challenge "the continuing influence of European visions of culture as pre-modern 'tradition' signified by objects and activities to be collected and preserved" (Foana′ota and White 2011:291). Designed as a collaborative process involving face-to-face dialogue with stakeholders and a growing number of trained, indigenous Fijian researchers, the project remains on track despite Fiji's political turmoil. With thirteen out of fourteen provinces mapped, IILC's teams have already

[5] Paragraph 5.2.3 "Nature and Objectives of National Inventory" of the training manual for the "May 2005 Training Workshop on Field Research Methodology Designed for Cultural Mapping Field Officers" specifies that:

"Designated in Fijian as *na ituvatuva ni kilaka itaukei kei na kena matanataki*, the national inventory project envisages the diverse traditional knowledge and cultural expressions that explicitly exists within the culture of the iTaukei (native Fijians). For the 14 provinces that compose Fiji, each has its own distinct local knowledge and cultural system, which characterize their uniqueness. However, with globalization and rapid development in information technology, traditional expressions in Fiji are continually being exploited for commercial purposes, and on the verge of being replaced completely by a massive culture of modernism. Hence, the inventory is/was established with the following issues in mind: (i) the preservation and safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritage; (ii) the promotion of cultural diversity; (iii) the respect for cultural rights; and (iv) the promotion of tradition-based creativity and innovation as ingredients of sustainable economic development."

returned to the first province mapped, Namosi, to verify information gathered back in 2005.

Yet there is still a lot of work to be done, including the refinement of data collection methodologies, improvement in digital equipment use and storage of data, digitization of archived materials, recruitment of additional field officers, refresher training programs, and improvement of the database in Fijian language housed at IILC—not to mention staying funded. However, one positive innovation of Fiji's Cultural Mapping Programme and other similar digital projects in Oceania is that they seem to have been successful in defying the hegemony of the Eurocentric secularization of knowledge, representation, and collection (Kreps 2007; Stanley 2007). Geismar and Mohns's (2011:134) discussion of the impact of digital technologies on how knowledge and collections are created and organized within the Vanuatu Cultural Centre's database[6] is relevant to understanding "the ways in which the specific of digitization and local conceptualizations of digital technology work together to create new aesthetic forms." For most Pacific Island communities like the Sawau, tangible and intangible heritage stands for important traditions, ideas, customs, and social relations, and it is embedded in stories and performances. In Fiji, certainly, the land and the people represent the communities' heritage; from this perspective, heritage becomes not accessorial, but fundamental (Kreps 2007). Kreps (2007) argues that several museums in Oceania should be transformed into cultural centers, and Fiji's iTaukei Trust Fund[7] recently gave approval to add an "ethnological" center to the GCC (Government Commercial Companies) Complex in Suva.[8] It will host digital archives and performative spaces to become both a physical and mnemonic space using collections and the institutions linked to the iTaukei—like IILC and its Database—to address contemporary issues (see Bolton 2001:230–1).

After Thomas (1989), Roy MacLeod argues that the "logic of colonization that privileged Europeans also conserved elements of local knowledge and so preserved cultural facts that indigenous peoples now employ" (MacLeod 1998:315). Quintessentially antique recording experiments in the Fiji Islands have led several authors (e.g., Abramson 2000; France 1969; Groves 1963) to express strong skepticism about colonial registers, censuses, inventories, and collections like the *Tukutuku Raraba*—oral histories of Fijian groups recorded

[6] Referred to locally in Bislama (the national lingua franca) as the Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta (VKS), the database system developed into the Vanuatu Cultural Information Network (VCIN) (Geismar and Mohns 2011:142).

[7] The iTaukei Trust Fund Board (TTFB) was established in 2004 by the Fiji Government to foster advancement of the Fijians and Rotumans to assist in their long-term economic, social, cultural, community, and political development. http://webmediafast.com/itaukeitrustfund/

[8] Pers. comm. Ratunabuabua (5 September 2016).

by the Native Land Commission. British Native Lands Commissioners held hearings across Fiji beginning in the 1880s, soliciting historical testimony that could be used to codify "traditional" Fijian social groups and land tenure practices and link specific groups to specific lands. Molded into the *Tukutuku Raraba*, this testimony promptly became "official history" and classified information, stored in the Native Lands and Fisheries Commission (NLFC) restricted archives (Humphrey 2009). Regardless of the accuracy of the information in the *Tukutuku Raraba*, gaining access to this "official history" is fairly difficult.

While IILC's Database may not be replicating the mistakes of its immediate predecessor, its postcolonial recontextualization of collective memory into an archival context does not appear to be molded to really meet the Sawau community's current concerns, perhaps because it rigidly frames these concerns within a formal structure. The community's concerns include the Database's accessibility and the lack of an open, non-hierarchical dialogue at the *vanua* (land, people, and chiefdoms) level. The Database does not allow anybody to browse existing archival documents and footage or to add new content and perhaps new members, which indeed is the Database's strength as a safekeeping repository for all the transcribed and un-transcribed material.[9] To extend Andrew Arno's description of the elaborate patterns of kava and gardening-fishing networks governed by kinship rules of communication among the Fijian community of Moce Island, neither the Database nor any database is tailored to meet the Sawau community's call for something more than mere digital and virtual communication networks (Arno 1993:99–109; see also Faulhaber and Forline 2008; Geismar and Mohns 2011).

Up in the Clouds or Down to Earth?

Yet, as Hennessy points out "Cultural heritage is becoming digital heritage: tangible objects in museum collections are being rapidly photographed and made available over the Internet" (Hennessy 2012:346). The backbone of the inventories and cultural mapping projects in vogue in the Pacific Islands and among other indigenous communities around the world is the idea of a "digital archive." Archives are more and more seen as part of a process of "virtual repatriation," where community objects, images, and materials that had been taken and housed in museums and archives are now being returned to the community, digitally. Only a decade ago, Brunnhofer and Kropač (2005:84) were asking: "but what is a digital archive?" Generally speaking, archives are arranged collections of documents. Some of these documents

[9] The iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture (IILC) is the repository of all the audio and video tapes from my fieldwork and *The Sawau Project* uncut versions.

are born digital, like photographs and videos taken with a digital camera. Some are not, like the many images the Sawau people literally retrieved from under their mattresses during the cultural revitalization that came along with *The Sawau Project*. Paper may be ephemeral, but data in new media may also suffer short life spans on the web, the biggest "document" ever created. Moreover, along with the incontestable conveniences of digital archives among indigenous communities, there are also constraints that call for careful consideration of what should be preserved and filed.

Over the last two decades, as digital technologies have grown, many indigenous groups have embarked on cultural heritage repatriation projects. Spurred by the potential for openness evoked by the digital technologies, free and open-source community archive platforms and content management tools started emerging in the mid 2000s. In her project *Digital Futures*, Elizabeth Povinelli explores how our archival obsessions might be reconfigured in support of what she calls an "anthropology of the otherwise."[10] The project began in 2008 as a conversation on how to transfer an archive that Povinelli had accumulated over twenty-four years back to a small indigenous community in northwestern Australia. Povinelli asks that we replace our desire for easy access and total knowing with a situated and embodied sociality that foregrounds obligation and trust, taking a different tack in collaboration. As with the alpha version of *The Sawau Project*, an array of materials (and especially videos) collected during Povinelli's fieldwork is located in the *Digital Futures* project within a strong narrative and geographic frame. A major difference is that we used the Sawau cultural custodians' Beqan-Fijian language voiceover, while Povinelli's *Digital Futures* opted for a voiceover in English.

A keystone in the Aboriginal milieu, is Kimberly Christen's Mukurtu an indigenous archive and content management tool, which is "a free and open source community archive platform that provides a standards-based, content management system adaptable to the local cultural protocols and intellectual property rights systems of Indigenous communities."[11] On the Mukurtu website, we learn that the digital project was "piloted with the Warumungu Aboriginal community and tailored specifically to their needs. This allowed users to browse existing archive material, place content, and even add new 'users' with their own profiles.[12] …The word 'mukurtu' means 'dilly bag' in Warumungu and was chosen by Warumungu elders to name the system designating it as a 'safe keeping place'. …A bag in which special possessions could be stored in older times, safe in the knowledge that anyone who defies the command would be cursed."[13]

[10] http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/index.php?project=90

[11] http://www.kimchristen.com/projects.html

[12] http://www.mukurtuarchive.org/index.html

[13] http://www.mukurtuarchive.org/about.html

Unfortunately, customary law protection relies on norms and sanctions that often seem to make sense only to members of ethnic groups. Within these groups there is a pressure to recognize and respect the rights and privileges associated with traditional cultural practices in the common interest of the members of the community. Nevertheless, since many of the individuals behind the unauthorized use of traditional cultural expressions are from outside those communities, or foreigners, they may not have the incentive to respect those norms. The fear of taboos, curses, or *lex talionis* as factors in securing compliance "is nonexistent due to the chiefs and elders' lack of jurisdiction, and the lack of common, communal and ritual interests" (Kuruk 2002:19–20; Pigliasco 2010). Brown points out that one might think archival collections managed by indigenous communities would "be liberated from ethical dilemmas that now face archivists elsewhere," but privacy, unfortunately, is not something "readily governed by a set of shared standards even within their own tribes" (Brown 2003:32–3).

Kate Hennessy's observation about our 2005 digital project is that, like Christen's Warumungu archive project, *The Sawau Project* takes as its first principle the use of new media to restrict, rather than to facilitate, unfettered access to digitized cultural heritage. The irony cutting through these projects, however, is that "digital media simultaneously constitute one way of asserting *sui generis* rights to cultural heritage, and make the distribution of representations of culture and traditions difficult to control" (Hennessy pers. comm. March 24, 2008).

Significantly, a new wave of researchers are more often digitizing their ethnographic archives to share them with research communities and develop new tools to facilitate the coding and contextualization of their fieldwork findings (see Underberg and Zorn 2014). At Digital Return, for example, we discover "a research network and online resource providing a place for dialogue and connection and direct links to people and projects related to the return of cultural and linguistic materials to Indigenous communities globally."[14] Among Digital Return's resources are Christen's Warumungu archive project, and similarly inspired projects in the process of developing digital collections, storage, and distribution strategies and adapting them to local cultural protocols. Among these are the Digital Himalaya Project designed by Alan Macfarlane and Mark Turin, housed at Cambridge and Yale Universities,[15] and the Inuvialuit Living History project designed by Kate Hennessy, Natasha Lyons, and Catherine Cockney in partnership with the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Centre.[16]

[14] http://digitalreturn.wsu.edu

[15] http://www.digitalhimalaya.com

[16] http://www.inuvialuitlivinghistory.ca

The Sawau Project's 2005 restrictions may seem to represent quite a technological oxymoron today, as in many other Pacific Island communities' early digitized cultural heritage projects. In his poem "Waka Rorohiko" ("Computer Vessel"), Māori poet Robert Sullivan explores the relationship between technology and the customary world. The poem anticipates some of the issues—and opportunities—that indigenous communities face as digital archiving evolves and a new generation of indigenous people embark "on an epic and challenging journey through cyberspace to rediscover their cultural heritage" (Brown 2007:77, 80, 89).

> I heard it at Awataha Marae
> in te reo–waka rorohiko–
> 'computer waka', about a database
> containing whakapapa. Some tapu
> information, not for publication.
> A dilemma for the library culture
> of access for all, no matter who, how,
> why. A big Western principle stressing
> egalitarianism. My respects.
> However, Maori knowledge brings many
> together to share their passed down wisdom
> in person to verify their inheritance;
> without this unity our collective knowledge
> dissipates into cults of personality.
> (Robert Sullivan 1999 in Brown 2007).

Social Media as Gift Culture

Ten years ago, we strongly believed *The Sawau Project* could have been made broadly available on the Internet, but Sawau members felt they would not be able to control how other people might appropriate their images, resulting in negative consequences for the community (see Pink 2001). In the last ten years, communication technologies have become woven into the very fabric of personhood. Going social, *The Sawau Project* will be testing the Sawau *vanua*'s crucial role in building, performing, articulating, developing, and sharing kinship ties and emotions linked to their values and customs.

Felix and I noticed spontaneous posting of 1970s, 1980s, and even more recent *vilavilairevo* images on some of the Sawau Village's Facebook pages, as well as some shots from our own wanderings, mapping expeditions, and hikes for *The Sawau Project* between 2004 and 2005. Quite emblematic is Rukua Village's Facebook page profile photo, the jacket of an omni-comprehensive publication published by the defunct Institute of Pacific Studies at USP and

Table 6.1 Social media "likes" of Sawau communities, 2014-2016[1]

Name of Group	Village	Description	Sept. 2014	Sept. 2016	Sept. 2018
Rukua Village, Beqa Island	Rukua	Community	609	631	706
RUKUA VILLAGE, BEQA	Rukua	Closed group	453	closed	closed
Naceva Village (Beqa) Development Projects	Naceva	Community	165	563	721
Soliyaga Village, Beqa	Soliyaga	Closed group	17	closed	closed
Naiseuseu Beqa	Naiseuseu	Public group	23	closed	closed
Naiseuseu Beqa	Naiseuseu	Friend	38	56	90
Sawau Youth	Dakuibeqa	Closed group	76	158	152
Dakuibeqa Village, Beqa Island, Fiji	Dakuibeqa	Community	n/a	425	1,400
Dakuibeqa Youth	Dakuibeqa	Community	n/a	99	246
Sawau, Beqa Island, Fiji	Sawau Project	Community	Under Construction		

[1] At time of press, the Facebook private group *Gone kei na vasu ni TIKINA ko SAWAU*, BEQA ISLAND (children of the Sawau tribe, Beqa Island) has recently emerged with 253 members, explaining that "This group is to bring and unite the family of Sawau. To make familys feel like they are at home. Please share the moments with familys so this group is reasonable to each and everyone." It combines videos of Methodist Church sermons, images of village life, obituaries, celebrations, and *yaqona* libations. Notable is the group's cover photo of a *vilavilairevo* performance accompanied by an emblematic caption by Tomasi Kamikamica: "This is wat we are known for and no one can change wat we are and who we are. #VILAVILAIREVO"

printed by the Fiji Times, *Beqa: The Island of Firewalkers* (Bigay et al. 1981). Despite the title and a photo of a *dauvila* (firewalker) on the cover, that book project's team of American and Fijian researchers—among whom is my collaborator and Rukuan resident Mika Tubanavau—focused more on geomorphology, climate, fauna, fishing, and subsistence than on sociocultural aspects of Beqa Island like the firewalking ceremony.

Rukua Village, perhaps in response to a heavy denominational competition between the Pentecostal and Methodist Churches, which I summarize later in this paper (see also Pigliasco 2012), has been the most active of the six Sawau villages in using Facebook as a billboard for their *vilavilairevo* spectacles and other activities. Rukua Village was actually the first of the six Sawau villages to join Facebook, establishing a "Community" there on April 6, 2010. More recently, Rukua also started a short-lived second page on Facebook, called "RUKUA VILLAGE, BEQA." Table 6.1 provides a snapshot of the Sawau Facebook groups I monitored in December 2014 and September 2015

Of about 900,000 people living in Fiji, more than 41.5% are Facebook users.[17] Miller (2011:158) observes that while the word "Facebook" stands for the social networking facility developed in the US, what any given population actually does with it quickly develops into its own local cultural genre. Analogies between Facebook and the Melanesian *kula* ring have recently abounded. Following Nancy Munn's (1986) observation that for the people of Gawa Island, culture is understood as a series of increasingly expanding exchanges, material culture guru Daniel Miller (2011:208) sees being on Facebook as something equivalent to both the positive and negative shrinking of what Munn calls "intersubjective spacetime" (Munn 1986:55). In an online Open Anthropology Cooperative (OAC) seminar in October 2010, Miller proposed seeing Facebook as a meta-best-friend, a concept danah boyd (who prefers her name all lowercase) echoes when she talks about it as a "social lifeline" (2014:20). Even in the middle of the night, we can turn to Facebook and feel connected with all those other lives, and come out of it less lonely, bored, or depressed. In other words, a relationship to Facebook as a thing is not axiomatically morally inferior to a relationship with a person (Miller 2010).

Watching the Sawau community going social, I would rather suggest a focus on social media as gift culture grounded in reciprocity. Australian "digital philosopher" Tim Rayner (2013) sees Facebook as a virtual potlatch, suggesting that every post, every tweet, every like and share is a gift that adds something to a common pool of resources (2012). The Facebook community pages of both the main Sawau villages of Rukua and Dakuibeqa for example, keep a quite similar emphasis on the mutuality of *loloma* (mercy of love), showing communal achievements like the construction of a new village

[17] http://www.internetworldstats.com/pacific.htm#fj

community hall and close-ups of fresh catch brought to shore by the fishermen clan or already on the grill, along with other traditional foods prepared by the women. Also present is *veidokai* (mutual respect), especially for elder members of the community, often immortalized in colorful *salusalu* (garlands) at their birthdays, *yaqona* libations sharing the *na bula vakaveiwekani* (kinship way of life), and funerals as part of the sentimental obligations and moral universe in which Fijians operate (see Arno 2005). Sharing on Facebook these images of mourning and other events taking place over several days allows the community to expand the "intersubjective spacetime" by bringing together a larger group of off-island kin related by descent and marriage to the person who has died and been buried (see Arno 2003). Digital-age ethnographer Francine Barone comments, in the 2010 online seminar on OAC: "Fame, audience, friendship, mourning—none of these are new on the web any more than they are new to people. …Facebook doesn't really do anything especially new or especially better than its earlier and contemporaneous incarnations on the web, it just does it all at once and perhaps faster/with less effort. …Facebook is not a place apart; it's a part of where many people live."[18]

Mauss (1990[1954]) drew on the Māori word *hau*, which means "spirit of the gift," to explain the reverence with which *kula* gifts are treated. These gifts are not just gifts: they are spiritual tokens of the culture of exchange. Mauss, Maurice Godelier explains, "lays the stress on the spiritual presence implicit in the gift rather than on the fact that the original donor continues to have permanent rights over the thing he has given" (1999:55). In Hyde's words, "the increase that comes of gift exchange must remain a gift and not be kept as if it were the return of private capital" (1983:37).

For example, within the Sawau group, the narrative of the gift (*isolisoli*) of *vilavilairevo* represents a typical Polynesian exchange system and reciprocal social relations (Pigliasco 2009). Folktales like the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* of the Sawau tribe are generally constituted by a storyteller and the social context. The storyteller articulates the narrative tradition via a culturally-defined speech act type characterised by a particular illocutionary force. Each variant of the tale reinterprets the sequence of verbal utterances, acts, and gestures performed by the two mythic characters of the *italanoa*: Tuiqalita and Tui Namoliwai. These include Tuiqalita promising a gift to the storyteller; Tuiqalita discovering Tui Namoliwai; Tui Namoliwai pleading for his life; Tuiqalita negotiating and accepting the gift of *vilavilairevo*; Tuiqalita and Tui Namoliwai performing the *vilavilairevo*; their agreement and farewell.

In Apenisa Kuruiwaca's words, the story itself is a gift promised to the storyteller for his stories.

[18] http://openanthcoop.ning.com/forum/topics/online-seminar-112-november?id=3404290%3ATopic%3A80788&page=2#comments

> *Na vilavilairevo e a tekivu e na dua na rogo i tukuni. Na dau ni tukuni na yacana o Dredre ka dau kenai vakarau mera dau yalataka vua o ira na mai vakarorogo na nodra nabu (ka ni vakavinavinaka) me ra na kauta mai.*
>
> Firewalking initially began by listening to storytelling. The storyteller's name was Dredre and it was the rule that all those who came to listen to Dredre's stories promised to bring him a gift, a token of appreciation (*nabu*) upon his next visit. (Apenisa Kuruiwaca in *The Sawau Project*)

Beqan storyteller Apenisa's and other audiovisual accounts in *The Sawau Project* exemplify a fundamental epistemological point of view. Each time the *italanoa* of how the gift of firewalking was received is recited, or remembered, it circulates, emotionally reinforces, and validates the ritual and the audience's respect for their ancestors. Elsewhere (Pigliasco 2010), I have discussed how in a gift economy things assume the social forms of persons (Gregory 1982:41, in Strathern 1988:134 and in Tsing 2013:22; see also Mauss 1990; Graeber 2001). Each narration, and more recently each post, comment, or like, re-establishes indexical relationships with paths and sites on Beqa. Narratives transform places into landmarks in time and space, making them monuments of island history (see Siikala and Siikala 2005:119, 131). Immortalizing the *italanoa* in *The Sawau Project* through the phenomenal participation of the storyteller Apenisa, and watching the community's reaction, I realized that up to the present day, the *italanoa* of *vilavilairevo* serves as the basis not just for the ceremony, or entertainment, but for how the Sawau's *na bula vakaveiwekani* (kinship way of life) is preserved.

Quite relevant at this point is Maurice Halbwachs' pioneering work on individual memory in its social context (Ketelaar 2005:2). Halbwachs developed the concept of "collective memory"; his book *La Mémoire Collective* was published posthumously in 1950. The British psychologist and professor of experimental psychology at the University of Cambridge Frederick Bartlett drew on Halbwachs's ideas in his studies of how social conditions influence remembering. Bartlett (1932) ran experiments where participants were shown open-ended stories and told to finish them realistically. He also passed away well before the digital age and the first mass usage of social networking communication, but a parallel between his experiments and contemporary blogs could perhaps be drawn. What is more important, however, and what is applicable to social networking theory in the work of both Halbwachs and Bartlett, is the focus on memory *in* the group, instead of memory *of* the group:

> A part or an aspect of a group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over—to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come from us from the social milieu. (Halbwachs 1992:43).

In recent digital anthropology studies like Van Dijck's *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, the focus on memory *in* the group instead of memory *of* the group emerges quite clearly: "Mediated memories are the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others" (Van Dijck 2007:21). In particular, Van Dijck's observation that individuals engage in "acts and products of remembering…to make sense of their lives in relation to the lives of others and to their surroundings, situating themselves in time and place" (2007:6) seems very well adapted to the Fijian *na bula vakaveiwekani* (see Arno 1993:76), its relation to the land, people, and customs (Nayacakalou 1975:66; Ravuvu 1983:122), and the emotional charge it carries (Tomlinson 2009:23).

Terras stresses how the development of an understanding of "autobiographical self is based on a complex interplay between our own memories of facts, emotions, and experiences, and our changing memories of these mental and physical memories" (2011:90). A closed group Facebook page with the video excerpts and multimedia of *The Sawau Project* would not be merely a container of the collective memory of their creators, users, and interpreters. "Media and memories are not separate entities," according to Van Dijck, with "the first enhancing, corrupting, extending, replacing the second—but media invariably and inherently shape our personal memories, warranting the term 'mediation'" (2007:16).

The Sawau Project and other similar projects (Hennessy 2006; Prins 2002; Ridington et al. 2010) exemplify the autonomy and potential of new digital media to collect original performances and narratives in indigenous languages, avoiding textual translations or mediation. First was globalization, then localization, now hybridization, as Marshall Sahlins warns us (2005:3). Jolly points out, however, that the boundaries of foreign and indigenous are fluid and contested, and nobody can successfully claim to make the foreign powers indigenous or to make the global local (Jolly 2005:137). In digital terms, Boellstorff observes that "we face the virtual as an emergent set of social realities that cannot be straightforwardly extrapolated by the physical world" (2012:52). *The Sawau Project* going social may actually challenge the role of imposed culturally alien databases and technology in terms of dissociating, or re-associating, indigenous culture from its context, depriving it of meaning, or giving to it new meanings. This and other projects' community responses may suggest a new role for digital "archives" and social media as tools for repatriating language materials and cultural documentation, such as photographs, film, and audio and video recordings, and their capacity to extend traditional cultural worlds into new domains, minimizing the risks of forgetting. In the case of *The Sawau Project*, only further ethnographic online fieldwork on its social life will provide evidence of the extent to which the communicative technologies are, or are not, respectful of the "ethno-poetics"

(see Ridington et al. 2010) of tradition, as these technologies frame or even reshape Sawau members' view of their past, and therefore their identity.

In the meantime, the Free Basics project launched in summer 2013 by Mark Zuckerberg, which asserts that "connectivity is a human right" and plans to bring affordable access to selected Internet services to less developed countries, has not yet entered the Pacific Island milieu.[19] In a 2016 article on Sapiens.org about Kampoeng Cyber, or "Cyber Village" in the heart of Yogyakarta, Nicola Jones explains that "the effects of the Internet and social media on the developing world are by no means consistent across regions" and huge differences are emerging in how they have affected people (see also Miller 2011).[20] In other words, echoing philosophy and ethics scholar Beate Roessler, it is too soon to understand if and what the Sawau community will lose when certain forms of privacy are lost.[21] How might the transmission of culture change by having more connections but less privacy? Roessler (2013:118), however, does not think that the consequences are as disastrous as people once feared. We simply don't realize how much we have already changed.

From Public Domain to Sawau Domain

Over the past two decades, we have witnessed a new and vital field of cultural rights norms and practices emerging in the shadows of cultural properties yet to be validated by formal systems of western law (Coombe 2009:407). Cultural heritage policies, in particular on intangibles, have acquired a new social and political value in Fiji and elsewhere in Oceania.

Kate Hennessy, co-architect of a virtual exhibit, *Dane Wajich: Dane-zaa Stories and Songs: Dreamers and the Land*,[22] and an expert in the transformative role of new media in museum and ethnographic practices, points out that although digital ethnographic materials can be used to build relationships and facilitate self-representation, they can also be uploaded to the Internet for instantaneous distribution, circulation, and unrestricted access, making otherwise privately managed tangible and intangible culture public. Ethical questions about the digitization and circulation of cultural heritage are being raised, like who has the right to determine how digital cultural heritage

[19] Formerly Internet.org, a partnership between social networking services company Facebook and six other companies (Samsung, Ericsson, MediaTek, Opera Software, Nokia, and Qualcomm).

[20] http://www.sapiens.org/technology/indonesia-cyber-village/

[21] Facebook's "Statement of Rights and Responsibilities" (updated December 2014) needs to be carefully evaluated in this case: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:We6t9JWxF5EJ:https://www.facebook.com/legal/terms+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us

[22] www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Danewajich

should be restricted or circulated. Once uploaded to a website, an image, video, or sound recording can be downloaded, appropriated, and remixed by any user with sufficient technical knowledge (Hennessy 2009b:6).

Hennessy observes that while *The Sawau Project*'s mediations constitute a virtual repatriation, the materials themselves cannot be said to have been truly "repatriated." There is no indication in the project's credits or elsewhere that copyright to the recordings has been transferred from the Fijian Ministry of Information to the Sawau tribe (Hennessy pers. comm March 24, 2008). Even if copyright were transferred, as I have discussed elsewhere (Pigliasco 2007a, 2010), under contemporary property rights regimes the creation of a database of returned or repatriated representations of the *vilavilairevo* is not enough to protect its contents. Even imagining *The Sawau Project* as a "defensive publication" supported by *sui generis* intellectual property rights legislation like Fiji's still-pending Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Bill (Draft Legislation), which integrates legal, educational, and economic development efforts with the safeguarding of cultural forms, is not free of problems.

Several legal commentators have been challenging the perceived weaknesses and potential sites of conflict inherent in the development of *sui generis* legislation. Ownership of traditional knowledge in the sense used by *sui generis* legislation is not a customary concept (Forsyth 2015; Forsyth and Farran 2015). I have commented on the Draft Legislation elsewhere (Pigliasco 2011a, 2017). Essentially, it represents an IP-based *sui generis* system that aims to create new IP-like rights for intangible cultural heritage and is designed to legislate traditional and moral rights over traditional knowledge and expressions of culture, which previously might have been regarded as part of the public domain. While the several Pacific Island nations, namely Fiji, Vanuatu, Palau, Papua New Guinea, and the Cook Islands, are in the process of drafting similar *sui generis* legislations, it will be interesting to see what kind of approach will be taken towards digital ethnographic materials virtually repatriated in virtual museums, databases, and community-based digital projects to safeguard non-digital cultural materials archives.

Some Fijian cultural policy makers like Sipiriano Nemani have been emphasizing for years that while both the Draft Legislation and its supporting Draft Policy are instruments designed to bring awareness to the grassroots—the heritage custodians—"no government policy, no organized workshop, no financial assistance can help the indigenous community in Fiji elevate its traditional values and identity. All is vested with the *vanua* and those at the helm of traditional leadership to proactively pursue and reinforce to members of the *vanua* the importance of maintaining key customs" (Nemani in Pigliasco 2011a:325; Pigliasco 2017). In other words, it is the *vanua* that is expected to take up the initiative to ensure that their intangible heritage is safeguarded and continues to evolve.

The *vanua* inevitably should emerge as a pivotal element in both the Draft Legislation and the Draft Policy.[23] Recently, Tomlinson (2014:142) argues that "in the wake of Fiji's coups, many non-Fijian researchers have felt it necessary to analyze transformations in understandings of the *vanua*" (among others, Brison 2007; Kaplan 2011; Ryle 2010; Tomlinson 2009). Tomlinson explains that the *vanua*, considered a divine gift that God gave exclusively to indigenous Fijians, became the political emblem that mobilized popular support for the coups of 1987 and 2000. More notably, the *vanua*, because it is synonymous with pre-Christian traditional Fijian values and customs, is seen by some Pentecostal and evangelical churches "not as the rock of existence but as a pit of demons. In their view, the land is haunted by non-Christian spirits" (Tomlinson (2014:122–3).

Churchscapes, Blogscapes, and Evilscapes

Several moments in the making of *The Sawau Project* would today have well been worth a tweet or a comment on Facebook. For instance, on the return from a trip up to the "mythic" upper Namoliwai region in the heart of Beqa, our boat ride to Dakuibeqa village was quite eventful. The fast fiberglass boat that had taken us to Rukua in less than thirty minutes in the morning took more than twice the time to get back in the evening. The boat captain was perplexed. The boat was barely making headway, but nothing was wrong with the outboard motor. After dropping Laisiasa Cavakiqali at Sese's plantation, where he was spending the night with some kin, the boat seemed to have a new life, and we sped back to the village.[24]

Laisiasa's weight could not justify the unusual boat "heaviness." Samu Vakuruivalu explained to everybody that the reason was that all the *veli*—the tree fairy creatures populating Fijian oral histories and in particular those of the Fijian firewalking ceremony—took our visit, the first in so many years, as an occasion to leave their *koro* (village) at Namoliwai and to follow the *bete* (traditional priest in charge of the firewalking ceremony) back to Dakuibeqa. But when they spotted the smoke at Sese's they all ran to find out if there was a *vilavilairevo* going on.[25] That evening, back in Dakuibeqa, the topic was on everybody's lips while we were sipping tea. Samu told the story over and

[23] As this paper reaches its final revision, there is a clear indication of an imminent motion coming from the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji to accelerate the approval process of the Draft Legislation and proceed to sign and promulgate the bill protecting Indigenous Fijian traditional knowledge and expressions of culture.

[24] See note 5.

[25] It is a common belief that the *veli* are attracted by any smoke. In Apenisa Kuruiwaca's words, the Tui Namoliwai, the chief of the *veli*, told Tui Qalita, "*Na vanua taucoko e dau kuvu kina na buka keimami dau raica se buka ni cava. Ke buka ni Vilavilarevo keimami na tiko kina*" (For

over again before we went to sleep. However, the real surprise came the next morning. Poasa Raisele, a farmer at Sese, arrived lamenting a sleepless night, for the *veli* had "camped" with them, keeping them awake all night. When he, his wife, and kids tried to get some sleep, they felt like someone was "holding" them, "pulling" them by their legs and arms from their beds. At this point, Samu told Poasa to command the *veli*: *Ni liu wani* (take the lead), back to their *koro* (Namoliwai)[26]

Alex Golub observes how the Austronesian concept of *mana* as a generic spiritual force has been mediated and framed by popular culture, "from *Star Wars* 'The Force' to Max Long's fake-Hawaiian New Age religion of *huna*," to become ubiquitous trendy shorthand for "the universal and most primitive experience of the sacred" (Golub 2014). The case of *mana* is a glaring one, and is similar to some other misconceptions of proto-Polynesian concepts like those associated with *tiki*, *taboo*, and *kava*. There are parallels with the process in which the *veli* in less than ten years have become persistently ubiquitous as Fiji's most anti-Christian emblem, first appropriated by Fijian Methodist ministers and more recently by Pentecostal pastors in their respective crusades to expel evil pasts and beliefs from the villages, which have been driven by an unprecedented denominational competition (Pigliasco 2012).

Even more recently, the *veli* also entered online popular culture via "Myth Beasts," a website displaying mythical creatures side by side with ads for "Stormfall Age of Wars," a medieval strategy game by Plarium. The website also links to similar websites like "Fuck Yeah African Mythology," "Bezoar Mustika Pearls Shamanic and Pagan Amulets & Charms," "Wicca Spells," and "Kundali Matching," where you can buy talismans, or functional chainmail armor, or an Iboga detox, in addition to finding your fate and learning how to cast powerful spells to become a truly strong witch.[27] I am reminded of Epeli Hau'ofa's comment about the *veli* when I was conducting research in Fiji in 2005:"Are they evil? Why are they considered *tevoro* (devils)? Christianity has been indigenized and the Sawau people might have been forced to realign their beliefs to the Christian religion" (Pigliasco 2012).

Traditional, mythical beliefs and practices are being strategically reinterpreted under the lens of competitive Christian denominations, independent of their local cultural and historical contexts: this is regular business in Fiji Christian politics (Tomlinson and McDougall 2013). Nobody can foresee the long-term implications of using Facebook. Ironically however, according to cyberpsychologists Amy Gonzales and Jeffrey Hancock (2011), social networking shows how modern technology sometimes forces us to

every smoke that we see, we try to detect its purpose. If the burning of firewood is meant for *vilavilairevo* we stick to it) (pers. comm. Nov. 15, 2004 h. 19:00, Naceva, Beqa).

[26] Personal communication, Jan. 27, 2005, h. 18:30, Dakuibeqa, Beqa.

[27] http://www.mythicalcreatureslist.com/mythical-creature/Veli. Accessed Dec. 5, 2014.

reconsider previous understandings of psychological processes. Perhaps in the case of the Sawau, viewing their demonized customs in a positive light on Facebook will require moving beyond their own individual Christian denominational belonging and dogmas.

What is more interesting is that there seems to be a correlation between physical and virtual church bulletin boards, suggesting that organizational digital tools are increasingly dominating Evangelical churches in their efforts to offer more global, dynamic, and interactive tools (Sturgill 2004; Tropf and Moore 2010; Useem 2008; Waters et al. 2011). Miller and Horst (2012:14) observe that religion itself is a highly committed form of mediation that remains very concerned with controlling the use and consequences of specific media, and several Pentecostal churches have been using Facebook to conduit an unmediated relationship with the divine (Gordon and Hancock 2005).

In Fiji, while Methodism reinforces, in its way, the communally oriented moral system, supporting the subordination of the individual to the traditional community (Brison 2007:42, 46), the Pentecostal Churches provide ways to imagine new kinds of communities, replacing tradition with the idea of individuals as autonomous and part of global Christian communities (Brison 2007:57; Kray 2002:410; Robbins 2003:222). Like the Apostolics that Miller studied in Trinidad, who are using the internet as God's chosen instrument to become a global movement (2011:89–90), the Christian Mission Fellowship[28] ministers I interviewed in Rukua Village in Beqa parade their denomination's globalism, technology, large institutions, and bigness while rooting it in the values of freedom, equality, modernity, and economic efficiency, as advertised on the Facebook page of their World Harvest Centre headquarters in Suva.[29]

Emblematic sermons in the villages of Dakuibeqa and Rukua focus on the present and the future, disregarding, denying, and disbelieving the past (Miyazaki 2000:37). Aspects of the *vilavilairevo* ceremony, which has been sensationalized by the colonial administration, pardoned by the Methodist and Catholic missionaries, and guarded generation after generation among

[28] "Founded in the Fiji Islands by Reverend Suliasi Kurulo, Christian Mission Fellowship International is a vibrant, growing Pentecostal church that has expanded its reach from the ends of the earth to more than 3000 churches in over 100 countries across the world. CMFI was first established more than 30 years ago with a major focus on reaching the unreached people of the world, with the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. CMFI Missionaries from Fiji are currently serving in countries in East Africa, Asia, the Pacific island nations and western nations of Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Latin America. Churches directly linked to the CMFI headquarters in Suva, Fiji, have been established in major cities around the world, where support for the mission field is generated. CMFI's headquarters is at the World Harvest Centre in Kinoya, Suva, Fiji. The church recently expanded its growing network with affiliates in Ecuador, Costa Rica and Mexico. CMFI Founder and President, Reverend Kurulo is recognised globally as a leader and pioneer in church planting and world missions." http://www.cmfi.info/about

[29] https://www.facebook.com/WorldHarvestCentre/timeline

the Naivilaqata priestly clan of the Sawau people, have been recently censured and pilloried as belonging to one of the last bastions of indigenous heathenism.

Conclusion

In "What Is Anthropological Enlightenment? Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century," Marshall Sahlins recalls a man-on-the-street interview in a Suva newspaper in which a Fijian matron shocked by the nude sunbathing at tourist resorts asked, "How are we going to keep our traditional customs if people go around like that?" Sahlins argues that, paradoxically, almost all the "traditional" cultures investigated by us are in fact "neotraditional," already mutated by western expansion (Sahlins 1999:xi).

In his "The Politics of Incommensurability: Localism, Globalism and Cultural Production in Fiji," Andrew Arno observes that Fijians talk about modernity "in terms of a new age or an age of enlightenment, *rarama*, as contrasted with the traditional era of darkness or *butobuto*." Furthermore, he postulates that "what we think of as 'local'—especially putatively traditional, indigenous—cultures or ethnicities have actually been recreated as corporate cultures by their links to advanced capitalism." The real challenge to contemporary globalized society, he concludes, "is to understand and manage the complementary dimensions of sharable and unsharable meaning that are shot through every semiotic and communication system" (Arno 2002:216, 239). Similarly, I argue that the challenges to having a happy life on social media in kin-based traditional societies like the Sawau of Beqa can be found inside a Durkheimian anomic trap, a limitation Arno saw on the modern way of life that prevents its becoming a total system of control communication (239). All four major mapping patterns of social action Arno identified more than a decade ago—kinship, chiefly tradition, Christianity, and modernity—are still in dynamic, if not precarious, interrelationship within Sawau social processes.

Arno (2002:239–40) sees each one as incomplete in scope: the church lacking cultural legitimacy needs both kinship and the chiefly system to reach inward and secure roots in the Fijian culture and way of life. Fijian culture needs the church in order to reach outward, articulate smoothly with modernity, and project itself on the wider stage of world affairs. Lastly, modernity, like Christianity, is a powerful and potentially disruptive communication control system capable of establishing cross-links with the other segments of cultural identity and ethno-consciousness (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). Building on Arno's scrupulous and still very contemporary analysis, I suggest that Sawau social media practices indicate that indigenous Fijian ethnic awareness has mirrored, absorbed, and transformed in its own ways reflections and elements of Western cultural systems and global discourses,

while the four major mapping patterns of Fijian social action remain as separate systems of communication that also emerge on the Facebook pages visited and liked by the Sawau people.

Tim Rayner (2013) observes that "social media gift economies give everyone the opportunity to be a chief."[30] I argue that Sawau members are exploring and expanding their social relationships on Facebook as well as on the other available social media. Yet it is probably premature to prophesy that social media will transform traditional Fijian lives by making discourses of kinship, chiefly tradition, Christianity, and modernity complete in scope and capable of living under the same roof. In a classic Goffmanesque situation, Sawau members posting online become both the actors and the audience, performing a role for their kin as a way to portray an ideal self in terms of Fijian reciprocal dependency and communal responsibility (see Goffman 1959). Inauthenticity, according to Rayner, is a danger on social media, but it is by no means the rule: "If we think of our followers as judges, we will anxiously try to please them. But if we see our followers as members of our social tribe, we see that they are witnesses to our gifts, and eagerly waiting to receive them" (2013:3).

The prospective tenth anniversary edition of *The Sawau Project* in a Web 2.0 environment remains still currently under construction on a Facebook community page tentatively named "Sawau, Beqa Island, Fiji." Posting interests, photos, and videos on Facebook allows Sawau members to perform a very conscious role. Choosing to become virtual actors on any social media stage, they must also be ready, however, to be judged by a real audience on the basis of what they share—although danah boyd would argue that they may instead choose to create a "lighter version" of their lives to be shared on Facebook to avoid pestering comments (2014:74). After all, Homans (1961) already showed half a century ago that it is part of humans' elementary behavior that individuals are rewarded for adhering to the group's conventions. As group conventions are changing in Fiji, as elsewhere, more shocked Fijian matrons may start protesting. This does not mean, however, that (fundamentally) Western digital technology is a violent threat to non-Westerner intelligence. Faye Ginsburg (2011) and other indigenous media scholars have nonchalantly denied that this is the case.

All the attempts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage using digital technologies previously discussed show, in Hennessy's words, how "diverse cultural communities are negotiating appropriate strategies for the documentation and transmission of their heritage, from sharing widely over public social networks like Facebook, to restricting culturally sensitive or sacred material to off-line community use" (2012:364). About *The Sawau*

[30] https://philosophyforchange.wordpress.com/2013/11/15/the-potlatch-and-the-panopticon-the-yin-and-yang-of-social-media-gift-economics/

Project's engagement with media and local heritage in a collaborative setting, Hennessy observes that it "required the negotiation of anxiety and opportunity associated with digital media, and decision making that leaned toward restricting circulation rather than participating in the continued appropriation of practices considered to belong to the Sawau people of Beqa" (349).

One "indigenous dilemma," as Harald Prins puts it, seems to be persisting here. Any indigenous community's decision to document and make digitally available certain cultural practices "is at odds with their conversations of keeping such traditions under wraps" (2002:67). This is a useful reminder that the global developments that we, as social commentators, find promising are often deeply connected to those we find dangerous (Inda and Rosaldo 2008:73). Ginsburg, after Landzelius's *Natives on the Net*, wonders if the historically disenfranchised traveling on this global "info-superhighway" risk becoming "roadkill" casualties (Ginsburg 2008:293; Landzelius 2006). Almost a decade ago she expressed a cautious optimism.

In terms of traditional Fijian protocols (*vakavanua*) and parameters of control, producing a limited circulation DVD is obviously quite different from running a Facebook community page, YouTubing a personal video, photo-sharing on Instagram, blogging on Tumblr, or sending a tweet. Applying a similar non cyber-dystopian view in the specific case of *The Sawau Project*, however, I suggest that a new way of sharing knowledge on social media will not necessarily force Sawau community members to emphasize reason and individualism over *vakavanua* in order to become digital natives.[31]

[31] As this paper reaches its final revision, the Fiji Museum in conjunction with the Ministry of Education of Fiji is seeking consent from the Sawau Naivilaqata priestly clan stakeholders and their Paramount Chief Tui Sawau to use selected audio-visual excerpts from *The Sawau Project* for the upcoming "Pacific ICH Online Exhibition" hosted by ICHCAP, a UNESCO Category 2 Centre based in Korea and working toward the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the Asia-Pacific region.

Figure 9. *19 December 1953*
Bete levu (high priest) Semi Raikadra (first on the left, standing) and a group of Sawau firewalkers escorting Queen Elizabeth II on her first visit to New Zealand on a special flight operated by Tasman Empire Airways Limited. Courtesy of Samuela Vakuruivalu.

AFTERWORD:

GIFTS OF HERITAGE AND THE LIFE OF THE LAND

Matt Tomlinson

The essays gathered in this volume are like an indigenous Fijian ritual: elegantly balanced, emotionally engrossing, deeply respectful—and playful at times. In his writings on the *vilavilairevo* (firewalking) ceremony and *The Sawau Project* to safeguard tradition in Beqa, Guido Carlo Pigliasco brings detailed ethnography to bear on fundamental questions of ritual, history, and belonging, doing so with fresh insight and a lightness of touch.

The fullness of this collection comes from its multidimensional approach to firewalking. This ceremony, Pigliasco observes, is a gift and a brand. It is a rite reshaped in colonial and tourist encounters, as well as a site of religious disagreement. It is intangible cultural heritage made tangible in bare feet treading hot stones. It is guarded by the *veli*, the spiritual little people, but managed by impresarios who modify the details of performance with different audiences in mind. Like any ritual, it is historical. It was invented, has been adapted, and will undergo changes in the future. But it gestures toward transcendence, a larger sense of what it means to belong to a social and spiritual order.

The key concept for unpacking this wealth of detail is the *vanua*, the indigenous Fijian term uniting place, people, and tradition. Literally, *vanua* can mean a place, land, territory, chiefdom, or the people within a chiefdom. As an adjective, *vakavanua*, it points to the traditional order. Many authors have written about the significance of understanding *vanua*. Pio Manoa says that *vanua* denotes first land, plot, space, place, territory, location, area, country. And it also refers to the group of people that belong to the allotted territory, their social structure, their cultural moorings and relational orientations, their locus of significance and identity, their pragmatic socio-economic unit, their territorial ascription, their enabling environment and enabling referent of gifting, their source and focus of obligation, their hope of stable living and rootedness. (2010:79)

This summary, although long, is still a condensation of *vanua*'s meaningfulness as both site and commitment.

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Some authors focus on sociopolitical aspects of the *vanua.* For example, Rusiate Nayacakalou wrote that the *vanua* is where "chieftainship begins to emerge clearly as a definite institution" (1975:37); chiefs both embody and represent the collective. Andrew Arno, noting how as a social unit the *vanua* is specifically the "commoners" under a chief, pointed out that the relationship between chiefs and their *vanua* "is one of mutual respect, *veidokai*, according to Fijian custom, not one of domination," and that "*vanua* also denotes something highly positive, even sacred, in traditional culture" (1993:10 n. 9; see also Arno 2002:243). This sense of intimate political and social articulation is aptly described by Pigliasco in his chapter, "We Branded Ourselves Long Ago," where he writes that "relational interconnectedness is integral to the concept of *vanua*."

Other authors bring spiritual aspects to the fore, as Pigliasco also does in his discussions of metaphysical dimensions of firewalking and competing religious interpretations of it. Asesela Ravuvu (1983:76) memorably wrote that "[a] land without people is likened to a person without [a] soul," and Ilaitia S. Tuwere (2002) expanded this kind of understanding into a theological reading of *vanua* as divine place—God's gift, imbued with *mana* (see also Degei 2007). All of these portrayals reveal complex connections between political orders, traditional practices, and Christian churches which demand recognition of the *vanua* even as they draw on other referents which extend senses of belonging in modern multicultural Fiji. Foreign anthropologists (including myself) who have come to Fiji to study a wide range of topics have regularly found that extended analytical discussion of the meanings of *vanua* is necessary for any understanding of history and politics.

Because of the *vanua*'s centrality to social life and imagination, the education scholar Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (2006) has insisted that any ethically grounded and practically effective research on indigenous Fijian matters must use it as a starting point. She advocates "vanua research" which "acknowledges the role played by the *vanua* in shaping the process and product of the study" (25). Like any good participant-observation project, such research proceeds in ways that have local sense and relevance. Pigliasco continues this line of scholarship by focusing on both physical and metaphysical aspects of heritage. His research exemplifies the kind of research Nabobo-Baba urges, but also adds new dimensions to understandings of the *vanua.*

Pigliasco's argument that the *vanua* writ large can be seen as a "brand," and ritual performances of *vilavilairevo* as exercises in branding, is novel and compelling. In the opening pages of the chapter which begins this collection, he describes the firewalking ceremony as a "signature brand statement of Fijian culture," and he develops the argument fully in "We Branded Ourselves Long Ago," where he recalls a conversation he had with the Tui Sawau. The chief and the anthropologist come to agree that identifying practices with the *vanua* creates a brand defined by "geographical indication": "both

in indigenous discourse and in western branding, goods are associated with localities or regions that are considered to have emblematic qualities and characteristics that they lend to their products." Firewalking, as an indigenous Fijian practice, belongs to Beqa—and not just to Beqa, but to Naivilaqata members of the Sawau community. Yet like almost any cultural form, it is detachable from its context and can circulate elsewhere. It can circulate virtually, as in textual and other mediated representations of it; and it can circulate physically, as when performance troupes have presented *vilavilairevo* to audiences in New Zealand, Australia, India, Japan, Hawai'i, and beyond.

Like Fiji Water, as discussed by Kaplan (e.g., 2007, 2011), Beqan firewalking is marketed as a concentrated expression of a place's essence. Fiji Water, however, is painstakingly positioned by its marketers as completely natural, which is to say, unsullied by human contact, whereas firewalking is a riot of contact: with earth, stone, fire, spirit, and a heritage of interaction between people and the mysterious and playful yet dangerous *veli*. It has been adapted, too, as the director of the Fiji Visitors Bureau makes clear, to give tourists "what they want" (quoted in the chapters "From Colonial Pomp to Tourism Reality" and "We Branded"). Beqan firewalking has apparently inspired similar practices in French Polynesia, Pigliasco demonstrates, but in its conjunction of compressed iconic tradition and "experience theater" it stands ready to become one of Fiji's "national symbols" ("From Colonial Pomp"). Here, Pigliasco's argument harmonizes with Kaplan's (1995b) observation that public ritual in Fiji has moved from independence-era celebrations of multiculturalism to a narrower focus on indigenous forms. As Pigliasco notes, there is also a tradition of Indo-Fijian firewalking, but it does not get marketed as a tourist icon.

The transnational movement of cultural heritage and its legal protection are fraught subjects, ones well addressed in the final two chapters of this collection. Identifying a practice as traditional and marking it for preservation can mean, ironically, that one is exposing it to more than the usual outside disruptions. As Pigliasco shows, *The Sawau Project*, a comprehensive effort which involved the digital recording of information, stories, and "shared memories" (including but not limited to firewalking), was both a *vanua*-supported project of safeguarding tradition and a forward-looking engagement which could expose tradition to unwanted outside scrutiny and appropriation. It was a "repossession of agency," which needed delicate negotiation throughout (Pigliasco and Lipp 2011:398).

The big question Pigliasco is addressing in all of these chapters, then, is one that needs attention now more than ever in studies of Fiji and studies of indigeneity in transnational contexts: How do projects of constructively engaging land and tradition make people's senses of land and tradition expand or contract in projects with different aims? To treat the *vanua* as eternal and stable works only as a particular kind of theological statement—and one that

would presumably not be endorsed by Tuwere, with his careful attention to both pre-Christian myth and Christian understandings of place and power, nor by Pentecostals who demonize the *vanua* and want to purify it of perceived curses (see the chapter "Are They Evil?"). The *vanua* is as historical as any cultural form. People build the *vanua* in all senses and use it to bring themselves together, but also to draw boundaries in which a recognizably foreign zone is cultivated locally (see Bashkow 2004 on such dynamics elsewhere). In one direction, the *vanua* is limited—for example, by Pentecostals who insist on its containment and purification. In the other direction, the *vanua* is radically expanded, a point which Epeli Hau'ofa would surely have endorsed. The *vanua* expands when performers focus on "reinterpretation and renewal rather than removal," as Pigliasco writes, invite tourists into ritual spaces, and record intangible heritage in tangible ways, opening up new possibilities of circulation. In this push and pull, Pigliasco observes, there is always the worrying possibility that institutional efforts to own heritage as legal property "may be mystifying or misrepresenting the social dynamics of the *vanua*, neglecting actual differences in the interests and internal relations of power" (2017:321).

A key influence in Pigliasco's writing is the work of Andrew Arno, Pigliasco's mentor at the University of Hawai'i. Both studied law as well as anthropology, but the influence runs deeper than this. Arno, who wrote extensively about conflict discourse, "control communication," and ritual, paid close attention to the interconnections among kinship, Christianity, modernity, and the *vanua* in Fiji. These dynamics underlie Pigliasco's nuanced analysis of firewalking, and his argument about *vanua* branding harmonizes with Arno's discussions of meaning as "corporate property" expressed intuitively and aesthetically in ritual and enmeshed in "economies of sentiment" (Arno 2002, 2003, 2005). It also fulfills the call Arno makes in his landmark work, *The World of Talk on a Fijian Island* (1993), to integrate analysis of local conversations with global dynamics.

This book is clearly offered as a gift to Pigliasco's friends in Fiji, but it is a gift in which everyone can partake. It is a tribute to the work of Andrew Arno, to whose writings new readers will hopefully also turn. Finally, it is a tangible result of Pigliasco's long-term work as a sympathetic and engaged anthropologist, someone seeing the best in the past, hope right now, and an expansive future that is both firmly grounded and always traveling. Like a Fijian ritual, Pigliasco's writings refresh senses of possibility while also providing a sense of completeness—not an easy balance to pull off, but one that looks effortless in the elegant final product.

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Emerging from more than two decades of research in the field and in the archives, the essays collected here explore the multifaceted topic of the Fijian firewalking ceremony, the vilavilairevo. The collection examines the intersection of the intertwined topics of cultural property, reproduction of tradition, and change with issues of (post)colonial representation, authenticity, and ethnic identity. The essays advance new insights on the tourist gaze and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and pose serious questions regarding the role of digital and social media as tools for preserving cultural legacies and extending traditional cultural worlds into new domains. Focusing on the response of the Sawau tribe of the island of Beqa to the commodification of the vilavilairevo as their iconic practice, this essay collection ultimately illuminates how the Christian cultural dynamics and unprecedented dogmatic schism surrounding the vilavilairevo spectacle are reshaping local notions of heritage, social sentiment, and social capital.

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