

“Enough is Enough: Affirmation, Celebration, Self –Determination”

Blong Stori Blong Yumi Long First Landing - The First Landing Short Story

Development Indicators and Vanuatu Wansolwara Dance 2 Planning Meeting

Viseisei, Fiji, October 2015

“Let God and Custom be the paddle of the canoe.”¹ The meeting at the First Landing² in Viseisei, Fiji, continued the Wansolwara journey into Rethinking Oceania, bringing academics, activists, NGOs, clergy and practitioners to assist with rebuilding our connections to our ocean home.

BACKGROUND: In September from the 15th – 18th, 2015 at the First Landing in Viseisei, Fiji, we gathered for a meeting on development indicators and planning for Vanuatu Wansolwara Dance 2 in 2016 for four days towards the end of one season and the beginning of a new one. We came from Vanuatu, Hawai’i, Aotearoa, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Samoa, California and Fiji. We came together to share our dream for our Wansolwara, one that is free to be self-determining. The purpose of this short story is to share the hopes and affirmations from First Landing in Viseisei, Fiji!

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, PERIOD: At First Landing, we firmly stated that “enough is enough”; it is no longer a question but a statement, a transition that is made possible through our experiences and narratives of ‘empire ‘deconstruction and the cry of our Wansolwara Mother for relief from our greed for more and more, the extraction of her resources and the pollution from our wasteful living. For our Wansolwara to remain resilient, sufficient and sustainable, it is our fervent will for decolonisation and self-determination that will pave the path forward to protect and give definition to our indigenous economy and our Wansolwara commons. The stories of the Vanuatu custom economy and the Melanesia Indicators of Wellbeing are not only narratives in development self-determination but also a refutation of the empire’s universal claim that there is no salvation outside its development alternative.³

As a “straight line is only a curve”⁴, how we come to assert our Wansolwara - our regional political, economic, social and ecological self-determination - was handed to Vanuatu to affirm our value systems, our stewardship for biodiversity and our cross-Oceanic solidarity. As we began to deconstruct the modern economy, we approach decolonization as reconstructing value systems, definitions and

¹ Chief Isaac Worwor (First Landing, Lautoka, 17.9.2015). This was also the fundamental principle shared by Hilda Lini that drove the post-independence vision of development for Vanuatu

² First Landing is the name of the resort that the meeting was held. The choice for selecting this venue was because of its historical and traditional significance to the indigenous people of Fiji. Oral tradition has it that it is the place where the indigenous people of Fiji first set foot on dry land.

³ Hilda Lini shared the story of the Vanuatu custom economy and how it is implemented. It is not only about systems of valuation but also the deconstruction and reconstruction of identity, development and political frames, and the education on it. Jamie shared the experience on how Vanuatu developed its own development indicators, originally known as ‘Alternative Indicators’, and the challenges faced in weaving these indicators into national plans (“Reframing and scripting the development narrative through indicators and dance”, 15th – 18th September, 2015, First Landing, Viseisei, Fiji).

⁴ “The ‘I’ in Tonga is only a ‘we... A straight line is only a curve. We define what straight is for us.”

(http://www.staradvertiser.com/features/20110219_Tongan_minister_meshes_culture_Christianity.html?id=116523668).

This phrase was coined by Mohenoa Puloka of Tonga to represent the relational way in which people of the Wansolwara see, read, measure and live their reality. Unlike the logical and linear way of understanding development where measures are more in terms of ‘more and more’, it speaks to an understanding of reality that is events and connecting narratives (www.spats.org.fj/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Issue_38.pdf).

measures of wealth, poverty and sustainability. This includes how we reconstruct value in indigenous economies, value that includes stewardship of our biodiversity, human rights, and our resources.

ROOTED IN LIBERATION HISTORY: In order to look forward, we looked backward to examine what brought us together at First Landing.⁵ It began with the tree that was planted at Malua Theological College in Samoa in 1961 with the formation of the regional ecumenical movement and its secretariat, the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC). As the tree grew, the “Household of God in the Pacific” took on new voices and new struggles to withstand the policies of ‘empire’. The Nuclear Free Independent Pacific (NFIP) and its secretariat, the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC), paved new pathways for cross-Oceanic solidarity bridging islands and impacted peoples together in the *nakamal*, the meeting house, to advocate our political independence and to resist the ‘nuclearization’⁶ of our region, most recently made evident by Fukushima. In the 1970s, a new branch grew which was SPADES and at its regional conference in Vanuatu, emerged the Vanuatu liberation movement and its struggle for independence. There were also the self-determination struggles in Maohi Nui and Kanaky.

At the turn of the century in 2001, a collective consciousness emerged with the ‘Island of Hope’ statement on Wansolwara values and vision⁷. Following in the footsteps of the leadership of the ecumenical movement in the region, the member churches of PCC and the World Council of Churches (WCC) revived a process that placed the concept of the ‘Island of Hope’ on the table of the regional leaders to reflect on and together discern a future for our region. While it did not move beyond the pages it was written to a national and regional social movement, it nonetheless gave a collective church and civil society voice to the various self-determining voices on church and theology, alternative development, economic justices, climate change and political identity in the late 1960s to the 90s.

In light of new challenges in regional development, PCC developed and tabled the ‘Rethinking Oceania’ vision⁸, a conceptual framework that calls for sufficiency in our lives and looks at the values that we need to reconsider as we move into reframing the ‘empire’s’ narrative of our Wansolwara’s political, economics, ecological, social and cultural frames. It (‘Rethinking Oceania’ vision) inspired and significantly influenced the emergence of two new branches; one an inter-governmental body that

⁵ Fe’iloakitau Tevi presented, in diagram form, the ‘tree’ which mapped out the beginning of the ecumenical movement and the various branches that grew out of the ecumenical ‘tree’. Emele Duituturaga presented on the history of PIANGO and how it came to be in partnership with PCC on this journey of rethinking our Wansolwara. Arnie Saiki did a brief input on Moana Nui and its core functions (“Reframing and scripting the development narrative through indicators and dance”, 15th – 18th September, 2015, First Landing, Viseisei, Fiji).

⁶ This refers to “The Peoples’ Charter for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific,” “11. Article 2: That the peoples and governments of the Pacific will not permit any of the following activities of installations within this zone: (a) all tests of nuclear explosive devices including those described as ‘peaceful’; (b) all nuclear weapon test facilities; (c) all tests of nuclear weapon delivery vehicles and systems; (d) all storage, transit, deployment or any other form of presence of nuclear weapons on land or aboard ships, submarines and aircraft within the zone; (e) all bases carrying out command, control, communication, surveillance, navigation and other functions which aid the performance of a nuclear weapon delivery system; (f) all nuclear power reactors, excepting very low capacity experimental units, all nuclear powered satellites, surface and sub-surface vessels and all transit, storage, release or dumping of radioactive material; (g) uranium mining, processing and transport;” (<http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/pacchar.htm>).

⁷ Fe’iloakitau Tevi was instrumental in the consultation process that led to the conference and publication of the ‘Island of Hope’ document. It remained a useful document for moral and historical purposes, and a reference point on Pacific values.

⁸ The concept note, originally titled “Rethinking Oceania” was first presented to the political leaders in a close session at the first Friends of Fiji meeting, organised and hosted by Fiji’s interim government in 2010 by Fe’iloakitau Tevi, who was the General Secretary of PCC at the time and who originally proffered the vision in the “Rethinking Oceania” concept note. It was later established as the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). The Wansolwara movement was the other branch of the tree which was inspired by the ‘Rethinking Oceania’ vision.

started in 2010 and was officially established in 2013, focusing on development cooperation among the island states, and the other is a social movement of churches and civil society organisations and individuals that started in 2013 and was formally launched at the Madang Wansolwara Dance 1 in 2014, focusing on the identity, political and development self-determination of our Wansolwara. There are also branches that emerged from the regional ecumenical movement and were originally linked to the national churches and local ecumenical organisations, focusing on ecumenical relations and contextual theology, human rights and democracy, peace building, housing and development, social empowerment and extractive industries, and research and advocacy against globalisation and for trade justice⁹.

Building on this momentum and at a critical time in its life, the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO)¹⁰, through a process of self-reflection, highlighted the need to rethink development, as framed and taught to us by ‘empire’. This process of self-reflection gave birth to its ‘rethinking development’ journey at the national, regional and international levels. From Hawaii and the United States, Moana Nui was formed in response to Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the new Pacific Pivot, which shifted military and economic planning into the region.

Since Malua in 1961, some of the branches have become scarred, yet the commitment and dream for a free, independent and self-determining Wansolwara remained. In regions throughout our Wansolwara, struggles of this dream continue to be born against the baseline of ‘empire’, and, holistically, we come together to find our moral, political, economic and ecological commons. Considering how we rethink our way forward, we examined our stories through “relational hermeneutics”¹¹, a double hermeneutical process of “deconstruction” and “reconstruction” in the light of the “relational consciousness” of the Wansolwara community. In this process, premised on the three pillars of Wansolwara cultures - scripture, and church traditions - we visited and revisited, and critically dialogue with issues in a multi-dimensional conversational way. We broke apart the ‘empire’s’ colonial top-down either or system in our language and customs to embrace the fluidity of our journey, our reconstruction, and our dance.

Such regional and national liberation movements for political identity and development self-determination reflect a rich history of liberation movements initiated in large part by churches and civil society groups, including NGOs to raise political consciousness in our Wansolwara on political and development self-determination issues. Central to these social and political movements, and networks is the refutation of the (Alter)native’s¹² universal claim and that the journey of humanity is a movement from the particular to the one universal truth – that what is true for one is true for everyone else – and our particularities are but obstacles to be marginalised and or removed. Our Wansolwara’s liberation history, however, affirms the giftedness of our specificities, our particularities and diversity, yet reminds us of our human connectedness and the universality of key moral principles and values.

⁹ These organisations are: the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECCREA); the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG); Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP); People’s Community Network (PCN); Citizens Constitutional Forum (CCF); and, the Pacific Centre for Peace-Building (PCP).

¹⁰ In 1991 PIANGO was formed to strengthen the capacity and coordination of civil society organisations, primarily on developmental issues, and to assist governments and their people on their developmental needs.

¹¹ Upolu Va’ai developed and presented this hermeneutic framework, basing on the experiential idea that our reality in Wansolwara is determined, defined and expressed in relationality (Relational Hermeneutics: Rethinking Pacific Development from Ground-Up’, presented at the regional meeting titled “Reframing and scripting the development narrative through indicators and dance” 15th – 18th September, 2015, First Landing, Viseisei, Fiji).

¹² John Chitosa in Nadave in 2014, made us understand that what we and our people had and continue to define us is not the alternative. Rather the alternative is the empire in its many faces and forms (“Remember Protest and Proclaim”, the Nadave Short Story, May 2014, Nadave Training Centre, Fiji).

THE WANSOLWARA DANCE: In September 2014, peoples throughout Oceania met in Madang, Papua New Guinea, which was the **Wansolwara Dance Gathering 1** and the launch of the Wansolwara movement, for a one-week celebration of our commitment and solidarity with West Papua, a mandate of the October 2013 *Sonaisali*¹³ partners consultation hosted by Bread for the World (BfdW). We voiced our stories and pledged our support by weaving art, music, poetry, dance and discussions, expressing our support for West Papua struggle for human rights and self-determination.

A few months earlier in Nadave, in Fiji, we gathered for four days to plan for Madang. Our intention was to tell stories and share experiences on what “Rethinking the Household of God in the Pacific” encompasses. We were individuals and representatives of organisations, people of diverse professional and organisational backgrounds, and personal journeys who share a commitment for our Wansolwara, our Moana Nui, our Oceania the liquid continent, to be free and self-determining. In Nadave, the Wansolwara was sacred because it contained the memory of our grandparents, who told us stories about ourselves and who we are as a people. We will not be portrayed or perceived as victims of the (Alter)native, either by ourselves or by others. We will affirm who we are and will celebrate it, even in our dark, fair or brown skins, and in our perfect imperfections. We will frame our language, create and interpret our art, our music, our dance, our poetry, our symbols and our rituals to tell us and others who we are and our place in this universe. We will be writers of our own history and will use creativity and imagination through narratives, poetry, art, music and dance, and by being present and practical.

In Nadave, we spoke about how the (Alter)native is the empire in its many faces and forms. The (Alter)native is faceless yet seen in the sorrowful eyes and scars of struggles of our people for freedom, for honour and dignity, and for legitimacy; it smiles yet without warmth; it embraces yet without compassion; it sings yet without the harmony of voices. It suppresses, at times by brute force as had happened in the days of our grandparents and still today to some of us, but most times by softly killing our people through charming, enchanting and charismatic words and by its crafty and uncompromising logical and judicial frameworks. It uses our mother’s womb, our language, our symbols and traditions to give birth and reproduce itself. It forces us to re-dream our dreams in its way. It operates by being creative in recreating itself in different forms and contexts. It has an intoxicating idea about our world and us, and has very powerful institutions and friends in politics, businesses, civil society, religions, academia and the mass media, and loads of money to produce and reproduce its single idea: that everyone everywhere ought to be the same and differences are but obstacles to attaining the universal dream of a single truth, reality. This is the story of the (Alter)native: the end of our human history is universalism, not the celebration of our particularities, our diversity, our specificities, the concrete conditions and narratives where we learn to be human and learn who we are.

VANUATU WANSOLWARA DANCE GATHERING 2 IN 2016: At the First Landing in Viseisei, we spoke about a ‘baseline of empire’, the litter of what the (Alter)native did and continue to do, to help understand what the (Alter)native is. Jon Osorio wrote in his invitation to the Moana Nui conference “While our islands may be beneath the notice of industrial and commercial nations as markets or producers, we are not beneath the notice of their armed forces and their need for harbors, airfields, missile ranges, lucrative mining rights, farms and fisheries as well as our precious limited resources like fresh water and native habitats. Such attractions may draw billions of dollars in foreign aid, but they

¹³ This is the name of a hotel in the Coral Coast (Western part of Fiji) where the BfdW Partners consultation was held.

also help to diminish our own independent economic development, as well as our political sovereignty.”¹⁴

In 2016, the **Vanuatu Wansolwara Dance 2** will invite other decolonization struggles in the Pacific: American Samoa, Bougainville, Maohi Nui, Guam, Hawaii, Jeju, South Moluccas, Kanaky/New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Okinawa, Rapa Nui, Tokelau, and West Papua to be a *Yumi Storian*¹⁵, a celebration of self-determination, a protest against the ‘empire’s’ single truth narrative of us, and an affirmation of who we are as Wansolwara - from Vanuatu to the region and to the world.

Vanuatu Wansolwara Dance 2 will about *storian blong yumi*, our story, of the political and development self-determination story of Vanuatu to her people, her story and with other political and development self-determination narratives of struggle from colonial and militaristic rule in our Wansolwara to the region, and together to the world. It will be about a people connecting with its history and legacy of their political self-determination struggle. It will be about connecting with the struggle narratives of others in the region, and it will be about a statement of ‘enough is enough’. Like the Madang Dance, the Vanuatu Dance will be about celebrating, protesting and affirming in narratives and arts.

Unlike Madang, at the Vanuatu Wansolwara Dance 2, Vanuatu will ask her people to remember her history, the reasons for her liberation struggle and that ‘development’ in Wansolwara is a ‘curve, not a straight line’; that measures of development are not about money and possession but about happiness and about human wellbeing. The Vanuatu Dance will ask Wansolwara to also remember her diverse yet painful history, and for some the experience continues to this day, the liberation struggles of today and to inspire the formation of Wansolwara groups and networks in our respective island homes so that the dance goes in the daily struggles and celebrations of our people in our Wansolwara.

Madang was a dance to remember... and the dance will go on in Vanuatu and into the lives, art and music of our people, and into the spiritual depth of our Wansolwara Mother, our Ocean, our Moana Nui.

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¹⁴ Invitation to Moana Nui 2011, an international gathering of speakers challenging APEC 2011 and the Pacific Pivot in Honolulu, organized by a partnership between the International Forum on Globalization and Pua Mohala I Ka Po. Jon Osorio convened the two Moana Nui conferences in 2011 and 2013, as well as the Wansolwara planning meeting in Nadave and the gathering in Madang, in 2014. (http://moananui2011.org/?page_id=1551).

¹⁵ Sharing stories together.