

Chapter 4

Leveraging *Vanua*: Metaphysics, Nature, and Climate Change Adaptation in Fiji



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Abstract Conceptions of Nature are infused with metaphysical ideas across all cultural systems. This is no less so in Fiji, where ideas of nature are infused with meanings across a rich tapestry of traditional *iTaukei* beliefs/practices and faith systems. Yet the question of whether these metaphysical ideas offer a means by which communities can harmonise the human and nature relationship, especially in terms of climate change adaptation, remains unexplored. This chapter examines this question by, firstly, outlining the underlying metaphysical systems within Fijian communities, explaining how these metaphysical systems view human/nature relationships. Secondly, we look to how these metaphysical systems are currently acknowledged within Fiji's climate adaptation policies, focusing on the Fiji National Climate Change Policy (2018–2030) and the Fiji's Climate Change Bill proposed in 2019. We argue that a more consistent appreciation of the metaphysical content of *vanua* may help develop more socially relevant adaptation strategies for *iTaukei* communities.

Introduction

Conceptions of Nature are infused with metaphysical ideas across all cultural systems. That is, the abstractions of metaphysical thought serve as the footing for everyday practices, providing the foundation for worldviews within which communities mostly operate. Indeed, Alfred North Whitehead (1925) argued that every science belies a metaphysics, or something we could call more broadly a cosmology.

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As the underlying basis for these shared worldviews, metaphysics can therefore play a crucial role in promoting ecological thought (Tucker 1994) and, by extension, climate change adaptation (Pearson et al. 2020). In Fiji, *iTaukei* conceptions of Nature and local ecological knowledge are infused with meanings, values, perceptions and cosmologies derived from a rich tapestry of traditional belief systems, myths, and various forms of Christian theology (especially Methodist), and other faith-systems such as Hinduism and Islam. This is in conversation with modernist notions of science, philosophy, and policy—each of which carry with their own metaphysical assumptions—also introduced to the islands as part of the steady ingress of globalisation. For instance, as evidenced by France (1966), part of this tapestry includes the colonial mindset that manipulated and altered key aspects of *iTaukei* metaphysics related to land and community for its own purposes of ownership and alienation. In everyday life, these ideas about Nature and the human-Nature relationships developed from them, become cumulative practices, beliefs, knowledges and relations with the environment (Berkes 2018) in which conceptions of Nature form a worldview together with an ethic that are to be understood holistically (McGregor 2004).

The question of whether the complex metaphysical system/s within Fiji offers a means by which its communities can harmonise human-Nature relations, especially in terms of future climate change and adaptation, remain largely unexplored. Ravuvu's (1987) comprehensive interrogation of the Fijian ethos thoroughly describes the traditional *iTaukei* worldview, including its metaphysical basis. Similarly, Tuwere (2002) reveals the metaphysical basis of Fijian society in a theology that links spirit, place, land, custom, and community in complex and overlapping layers of lived practice. Others like Kaplama (2016) or Miyazaki (2004) have compared aspects of Fijian metaphysics with or against dominant Western forms. Others still have looked to the metaphysics behind specific historical practices in Fiji (see e.g. Obeyesekere 2005). Most recently, Fache and Pauwels (2020) have highlighted the relational ontology and knowledge system in *iTaukei* thought, looking to combine such traditional knowledge systems and western ecological science. These explorations serve as the basis for our examination of the metaphysical content of the belief-system and cultural practices in traditional Fijian (*iTaukei*) communities¹ as a potential way to increase effectiveness of climate adaptation policy and communication.

Fiji, along with many other Pacific Islands, is highly vulnerable to climate change and requires environmental policies and adaptive strategies amenable to its context, inclusive of its philosophical and cultural systems. Environmental policy aspires to be neutral and objective, framing solutions to environmental problems and decision-making processes in secular terms and language. In reality, neither environmental policy nor the science underpinning and driving such policymaking are objective or

¹We are aware of the religious plurality in Fiji. However, to limit the scope of our chapter we focus on *iTaukei* population (around 57% of the population) that are predominantly Christian (around 90%) and nearly 2/3 of which are Methodist. See <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/index.php/statistics/social-statistics/religion>.

neutral (Latour 2004; Leipod et al. 2019; Pascoe et al. 2019). National approaches to climate policy are captured within a few dominant framing discourses that largely exclude the worldviews of traditional societies and indigenous communities. In the last 25 years, for instance, environmental policies related to climate change have been typically articulated under the flag of ‘development’ and economic rationalist discourses (Pascoe et al. 2019). Such discourses on climate change policy have a tendency to either ignore or suppress local realities (Brightman and Lewis 2017). Climate change policy in Fiji is no exception (see for example Republic of Fiji 2018). In the Pacific Islands, including Fiji, Luetz and Nunn (2020) and Nunn et al. (2016) have argued that climate change initiatives have failed due, in large part, to the lack of consideration of characteristics of contemporary Fijian society including cultural attributes related to spirituality and faith. Aligned to this denial of spirituality, climate change adaptation initiatives and strategies are largely technocratic, science-driven, and command-and-control approaches that efface local knowledges and worldviews (Luetz and Nunn 2020; Oakes 2019).

In our chapter, we are particularly concerned with exploring indigenous Fijian metaphysics that are deeply implicated within spirituality, faith and cosmologies of Nature that may have been downplayed in climate adaptation policy formation. Without sufficient acknowledgement of the complexity of *iTaukei* metaphysical ideas that permeate the archipelago’s culture and thinking, any adaptive strategy may be ineffective—to use a *iTaukei* metaphysical expression, it would lack ‘*mana*’, that is lacking proper ordering, relationship, relatedness, connectedness and thereby remain inconsistent with the understandings of the community (see Tomlinson 2009; Tomlinson and Bigitibau 2016; Tuwera 2002).² Without being embedded and derived from this metaphysical system and its interconnectedness with Nature (and spirit and community) as encapsulated in the notion of *vanua*, we contend that such policies will remain external impositions with little traction or relevance. As stated by Leveridge (2009, p. 25), following Nabobo-Baba’s anthropological studies in Fiji:

The philosophies and beliefs of a community define the nature of their knowledge and their way of knowing. They also shape environmental perception, [a]ffecting how people interact and learn to survive within their environment.

Taking this claim at face value, what we suggest is an alternative way of communicating adaptive climate change strategies commensurable with local metaphysical systems across Fiji. This could make climate policy and science understandable and actionable by the community in which it is to apply. Yet, given the size of scope of metaphysics and cosmologies, our chapter can only outline these issues, identifying areas where more research should be undertaken—including the need for a much wider study that includes the cosmologies and metaphysics of the other important faith-systems in Fiji, including Hinduism and Islam.

This chapter is divided into three parts. Firstly, we outline contours in the *iTaukei* metaphysical systems within Fiji and their conceptions of Nature as well

²There are many various definitions of *mana* that we have adapted from. See Na iVolavosa Vakaviti (Fijian Dictionary). Suva: Institute of Fijian Language and Culture. Also see Tomlinson (2009).

as human-Nature relationships. Secondly, we analyse how such metaphysical ideas are expressed within the most recent Fijian climate policy—both the *Fiji National Climate Change Policy* (2018–2030) (hereafter The Policy) and the proposed *Fiji's Climate Change Bill*—showing how these are largely de-linked from the *iTaukei* cosmological worldview. In our conclusion, we summarise key points in our discussion and speculate on how a more consistent appreciation of *iTaukei* metaphysics articulated through the idea of *vanua* might be used to co-create adaptation strategies from within these belief-systems and therefore reach *mana*, ‘achieving its intended purpose’ (Tomlinson 2009).

Metaphysics and the Cosmology of Nature in iTaukei Fiji

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophical enquiry into the fundamental nature of reality—it grapples with ideas above/over (meta) the physical realm. All cosmologies (or worldviews) have an ontology within them, an assumption of ‘what there is’, containing metaphysical ideas as well. Whilst at a philosophical level, metaphysics is focused on first-order principles (basic proposition or assumption that cannot be deduced from any other proposition or assumption—see Aristotle 2018), at the social level of the every-day, it is the common assumptions of one’s world—its origins, types of being, and purposes—that give shape to forms of acting, being, meaning, and thinking. What stems from this broad conception of metaphysics is that traditional societies have a deep metaphysical basis for their worldview that is no less complex merely because it may be expressed in myth and custom, cultural practices, and ritual, rather than weighty tomes. Yet Western science, philosophy, and policy are only beginning—and slowly—to engage with these metaphysical traditions, let alone understand them. For instance, environmental policy is willing to take from traditional ecological knowledge but largely unwilling to (re-)frame itself from within this discourse and practice (Berkes 2018).

Metaphysical traditions must be understood in their own terms, inclusive of culture and historical context. Yet, given the shared concern of metaphysics in determining the nature of existence, different systems can dialogue with each other despite the fact they also compete. Our chapter is not intended as deploying non-Western metaphysics to challenge Western metaphysics or vice versa, but to see how these relate to the formation of climate adaptation policy within the particular cultural context of the *iTaukei* of the present that, as we will see, is a hybrid system (as the vast majority of metaphysical ideas are today). One of the key areas in which metaphysics meets climate policy relates to the cosmological understandings of Nature itself: what there is in the universe, what are its origins, and its development (and related questions as to ‘why’ the universe is the way it is). Facets of these concerns are reflected in Fijian

origin myths, like that of Degei.³ Cosmology, then, is not just the scientific study of the origins of the universe but also includes belief systems which straddle Nature, the spirit and social worlds. The outer boundary of any cosmology is ultimately metaphysical because it hypothesises beyond the scope of scientific knowledge at any given time rather than knowing through demonstration. At this edge cosmology is speculative. Yet there is a stark contrast between the types of explanation available to a cosmology in physics (Unger and Smolin 2015), between the evidentiary burden of ‘testable hypothesis’ and the epistemological limits of our empirical means for doing so. Its search for ‘physical laws’ (i.e. universal truths) is akin to a first order principle of metaphysics and it is here that the need to explain meets assumptions that are not yet explainable—the problem of infinite regress of causes or non-dependent First Cause of the universe being the exemplar. Yet focusing on explanations of cosmology is only one aspect of metaphysics. Of equal importance are the values and interests that a community places around such understandings. Just as the physical conditions necessary for our existence impose a selection effect on what we observe as cosmology, so too does the philosophical and cultural system influence *how* this is interpreted and for *what* purposes. As stated by Nabobo-Baba (2006, p. 24) “knowing and knowledge are not accultural, but are products of, and thus influenced by, particular cultures, and should be understood through research techniques which reflect that culture.”

Our argument is focused on this cultural aspect of cosmology, the way in which “metaphysics in practice” (Law and Lien 2018, p. 152) shapes climate adaptation policy and the ways it *could* be aligned and enacted more effectively. The historical context in which climate adaptation practice takes place is entangled with metaphysical understandings that reproduce a particular kind of message. Immanent to this message is the positioning of humans, Nature and spirit (including religious belief). To describe the genealogy of such entanglements is beyond the scope of this chapter. The way that certain assumptions are instrumentalised in climate policy, however, can be presented within examples of legislation (that we trace in section two). When analysing the relation between metaphysics and Nature—and the community values/interests of these in the context of *iTaukei* peoples today—the scope of research is obviously vast. Nevertheless, some relations between metaphysics and *iTaukei* conceptions of Nature do stand out as paramount:

1. The interconnectivity and deep intersubjective relationalism between ancestors, community, land, and spirit in the concept of *vanua*, and;
2. the relation between this traditional belief-system and the colonisation of this metaphysics under a hegemonic Christian theology, and, colonial land-owning system.

Studies have shown there is “considerable unanimity” on the understandings of the postulates of pre-Colonial Fijian cosmology (Parke 2014, pp. 38–39), some

³According to the myth The Great Serpent Degei was the the creator of the islands and people, and, controlled aspects of natural process, for instance, day and night with the opening and closing of his eyes or earthquakes (see Reed and Hames 1997).

of which continues to exist in socio-cultural and politico-legal forms, albeit now cross-fertilised with other more recently introduced metaphysical ideas. Pre-colonial *iTaukei* practices gave the highest respect to Nature that was linked across its cosmology: in material terms of flora/fauna and the physicality of land and sea; in social terms, such as ancestors, customs, morality, and the community itself; and to spirits, theological principles, and creation stories. The primary examples are the Fijian myths, especially of Dakuwaqa and Degei, that reveal the prominence of Nature across this cosmology, including origin stories, ancestral migrations, and ongoing protections of the community (Reed and Hames 1997). These are not just mythical stories of the past but remain lived metaphysical traditions within community norms, customs, and morality—despite colonisation, Christianisation, and modernisation. For the *iTaukei*, as across most of Melanesia generally, there is no separation between Nature and society, nor are either of these realms separate from spirit (Foale 2006). The social realm does not have control or authority over the natural world either in terms of its power or in normative or spiritual senses. Instead, the *iTaukei* are nested in relations across and between humans *and* spirits *and* Nature. This relational ontology as Poirier (2008) describes it, is fundamental for any effective climate change policy and climate change action.

This relational ontology is exemplified in the lived concept of *vanua* that is clearly visible in all daily practices of *iTaukei* from the structure of the community, to agricultural cultivation, to storytelling. Whilst sometimes reduced in translation to ‘land’, *vanua* is at its core a metaphysical postulate. For Ravuvu (1987), it includes common values and beliefs about life in the natural and spiritual worlds. For Kaplama (2016, p. 161), it is at once cultural and philosophical, physical and metaphysical, an “idea-object” that “constitutes not only the physical land on which Fijians live, eat, dwell and regenerate but also their particular worldview” (*Weltanschauung*). He summarises *vanua* as “the representation of the unity of earthly-physical and spiritual-metaphysical life as well as the unity of all members of the *vanua*” (2016, pp. 160–162). This encompasses socio-ecological environments (e.g. lands, oceans, rivers) and the realms of spirits and life forces (e.g. spirits of the ancestors, deities) “who are believed to have the power to affect, direct and sustain life in earthly realm” (Kaplama 2016 pp. 160–162).

One of the keys to unveiling—and leveraging—the complexity of relations between metaphysics, *vanua* and climate change policy and action, lies in acknowledging the interconnectedness of this cosmology. As Parke (2014, p. 35) explains, there is no disjunction “between the realm of people and the realm of spirits. Spirits and people shared a common world, of which the geographical component included places with which both people and spirits were closely and directly associated.” This is affirmed also by Nabobo-Baba (2006, p. 88) who observes that “the spiritual and the material worlds are interconnected; respect for people, resources, the ancestors, and God, govern all important behaviours and values.” There is neither a duality between realms, nor is either realm autonomous. At the metaphysical level these form an interconnected whole. This cosmology includes relations of dependency and mutual recognition with Nature. That is, within the relational cosmology of *vanua* is intersubjectivity and not just between human-human within bonds of

community but including all ancestors and non-human spirits as well. Nature is very much subjective: places are subjects with agency, as are living creatures. The roles that spirits play are environmental just as much as they are social. For example, Parke (2014, p. 32) describes so-called *digiwai* spirits related to natural processes:

...one [is] responsible for successful food crops, another for success in hunting, and a third for fishing. These spirits could in turn expect to be respected and looked after by the living, by suitable presentations of food and *yaqona* [kava]. Failure on the part of the living to fulfil their reciprocal obligations could result in drought or in a person being bitten by a wild pig or by a shark.

Similarly, Ravuvu (1987, pp. 14–15. Emphasis added) states that:

... the cultural *vanua* permits insights into people's actions and how they bear on their efforts to live and resolve the exigencies of existence both in this earthly world and in the world of the spirit beings who can protect and destroy, or direct and make possible what is required for life. For to live well in this world *and* in the other world, one has to live according to *vanua* beliefs and values. Thus the concept of *vanua* is an encompassing one; *it is the totality of a Fijian community*. Used in various contexts, it can refer alternatively to the social and physical environments, or to the supernatural world, or to all the elements which make life occur.

These passages show how the levels of Nature, spirit, and human are spatially and temporally linked as the totality of community.

This co-existence requires the human community to pay customary respects to the other realms, including respect for Nature and to the ancestral spirits (*kalou-vu*) who fulfil a similar role—that is, in this relational cosmology, Nature and spirit are inseparable from each other and from community. The teaching and learning of important traditional knowledges, for example, are deemed to be “guided by familiar *vanua* spirits or God” (Nabobo-Baba 2006, pp. 117, 127). These ancestral spirits are concerned for the wellbeing of the *yavusa* group descendants and, importantly, these relations between the living and the ancestral spirits are “reciprocal”—with the community to frequently present *isevu* (first-fruits) and various other customs to both placate them but also renew connections with these worlds (Parke 2014, p. 29). Both ancestral and natural spirits watch for breaches of customary codes of conduct or respect that mirror social norms of the community regarding reciprocity. Consequently, these “cords” between people and *vanua* are constantly replayed in Fijian ceremonies—not only solidifying existing social bonds of community but also those of ancestral spirits and of the natural world around the locality. As stated by Kaplama (2016, p. 158), “the people that constitute it [the community] must continually strengthen the *vanua* in order to preserve their values not as individuals but as the members of the *vanua* which gives them their identity.” He explains that the “Fijian ethos” is defined by: “reciprocation, recognition, respect, appreciation, strengthening of the bond, incorporation, unity, continuity” and the lack of any of these is seen negatively as leading to weakness and eventual discontinuity of the *vanua* bond (see Kaplama 2016, pp. 160–161).

Tomlinson and Bigitibau (2016) analyse a range of performative practices that link spirits, kava, and various speech practices with traditional, pre-Christian society.

There is even ongoing communication between the community and ancestral spirits through the *Bete* (the traditional priestly group). The *yaqona* ceremony for new visitors is not just to seek formal inclusion in the community from the head of the *yavusa* and under the relevant *mataqali* (the village-based, agnate grouping) but also for the supplication of the spirits—both ancestral spirits and those of the local natural environment—to admit the visitors as well. The offering, acceptance and mutual consumption of kava is the gateway or portal between realms, though these realms are at all times co-present. Such actions of reciprocity fulfil a range of social functions, from promoting group cohesion, performing ancestral ties, maintaining learned traditions/stories, upholding norms of conduct, and designating land entitlements. Through these deliberate performances—whether stories, rituals, or moral practices/customs—comes the constant recognition of ancestors, Nature and spirit. It means there is “continuity” in *vanua* as a lived tradition that, despite its metaphysical basis, remains the core socio-political basis of *iTaukei* community within their daily lived practices as well (Farrelly 2010; Ravuvu 1987). There is no separation, then, between the realm of people and the realm of spirits, whether natural or ancestral. Spirits and people share a common world of which the geographical component—Nature itself—includes those places within which both are “closely and directly associated” (Parke 2014, p. 35).

The emphasis of interconnectivity and reciprocity within this cosmology would suggest a philosophical and cultural system more conducive to ecological views of stewardship of Nature, given that spirits and ancestors are attached to the physicality of places—a powerful impetus for the protection of natural attributes associated with them. Many studies have found that indigenous traditions often foster pro-environmental practices and ways of being. For example, after a survey of the literature on religious belief and environmental attitude, Taylor et al. (2016, pp. 1000–1001) concluded that “indigenous traditions may be more likely to be pro-environmental than other religious systems and that some nature-based cosmologies and value systems function similarly.” The *iTaukei* cultural practices surrounding *vanua* seem consistent with this finding. In particular, the historical and mythologised relations of the *vanua* are revitalized to enable “current problems to be faced jointly” (Ravuvu 1987, pp. 247–248) by the *vanua* community itself. There is intentionality and agency within this force. This raises the fundamental question that, if the *vanua* is threatened by climate change, how the community could adapt in accordance not only to preserve *vanua* but to ensure *vanua* traditions are upheld and respected within adaptation approaches. Linking adaptation as part of reciprocal duties is crucial then to effective policy formation, which we will explore shortly.

But before that, one crucial question is how does the *iTaukei vanua* tradition co-exist today alongside other introduced metaphysical systems, particularly of colonialism and the now dominant Christian theology? Is *vanua* subservient, subsumed, or co-productive with these systems? Turning first to Christianity, like other Pacific Islands, historical processes led to the Christianisation of Fiji (Luetz and Nunn 2020). What emerged was a hybrid of traditional beliefs that interconnected Christian faith with historical, cultural, and political processes and metaphysical understandings of

belonging to the land in space and time (see Ryle 2005, p. 77). For Ryle, *vanua* blended with Christianisation, as she writes:

Christianisation entailed the redefinition of *vanua*, adding the Christian God as supreme power among the Fijian cosmology of deities, yet retaining most other elements and understandings of *vanua* as an ancestral shadow-land of place, kinship relations and spiritual power that exists alongside Christian belief and practice (*lotu*).

This influence is clearly reflected in the three main ideological pillars in Fijian society today: ‘*Vanua, lotu and matanitu*’, broadly translated as “land and tradition, Church and governance” (Ryle 2005, p. 58; 2010). This metaphysical hybridisation bears the complexities of melding ancient local beliefs with Christian religious precepts (and of course political interests at the time of colonisation and independence). Christianity proved effective at its missionary work because of its capacity to absorb traditional practices and acknowledge these within its structure, both theological and liturgical. Here, the ‘message of God’ resonated strongly with Fijian people in terms of their existing metaphysics of social hierarchy and the derived notion of the *mataqali* for land ownership purposes (see France 1966). The latter was an expression of the military might, underpinning missionary activities that was used politically by various interests across the archipelago. The predominantly Fijian/Methodist religio-cultural structure that came into being during the colonial period (1874–1970) (Ryle 2005) bears testimony to the construction of national or group identity, along the lines of Benedict Anderson’s (2006) ‘imagined communities’ and, as Ryle suggests, “in people’s minds belongs to a not very distant past and is an essential part of their cultural and historical sense of identity” (2005, p. 61).

The arrival of Christianity did not just involve a spiritual change but entailed the contestation of existing metaphysical ideas and rewriting of worldviews. In terms of spirit, the most significant was the subsumption of animism and polytheism, the many localised gods and myth-stories, under an overarching monotheism. While these stories remain, they are being less and less told, and are not seen as efficacious (*mana*) though still constitute a strong belief-system (Tomlinson 2009). The older generations impart these stories rarely to the younger generations, deem them inconsistent with Christian beliefs, and yet they still co-exist—especially the spirits of Nature in particular places that remain *tabu*. As Nabobo-Baba so aptly describes it, Christian perspectives are often associated with Indigenous elements of spirituality though the latter are less “publicly or loudly declared” (2006, p. 87). Despite their subsumption these stories hold potential for a better understanding the metaphysical ideas regarding specific phenomena including the origins and authority of social customs and explaining aspects of Nature itself (Nunn 2001). Indeed, these forms of spirit seem to adapt to the changing make-up of the community at any one time, perhaps losing favour and/or *mana* relative to other temporal actors yet nevertheless always secure within this cosmology and, in this way, remain the core traditions of belief that the community may retreat to during crises.

Given the fundamental relation between all three levels (human, spirit and Nature) in the Fijian metaphysics, the contestation of the understanding of the spirit world by Christian theology meant a shift in the conceptions of Nature too. For example,

when he conceded in 1854, Cakobau was compelled to ‘*lotu*’ (enforced religious conversion) alongside the destruction of the traditional temples in Bau and cutting down the sacred *nokonoko* trees. This was a visceral example of how social take-over and colonial order went hand-in-hand with spiritual *and* natural destruction. Another story from Kadavu in 1863 recounts of when a chief ordered a sacred *vesi* to be cut down declaring: “If the God is in the tree, the axe will be spoilt, but if the axe cuts it, that will be proof the tree is only wood. The trees were felled, and thus the ‘religious test went in favour of Christianity” (Thornley 2002, p. 23; Tomlinson 2009). This was a shift between human powers tested through the divine. Such political actions challenged the very foundation of the traditional metaphysical assumptions, significantly undermining the ‘old gods’ and Nature with it. Jehovah “towered” over the local gods: such symbolism was particularly resonant in Fijian metaphysics and characteristics of hierarchy (Toren cited in Tomlinson 2009, p. 86). But the old gods were sidelined, not abolished or disbelieved. This was part of a sustained campaign by missionaries to shame aspects of traditional Fijian culture by over-emphasising “warfare, cannibalism, torture, infanticide, widow strangling, and treacherous murder” (Brantinger in Kaplama 2016, p. 157). Aspects of this shaming continue today in some sermons. However, this was a two-edged sword for whilst the Missionaries recast local spirits as ‘demons’ and denounced them, it nevertheless affirmed their very presence and power in their respective “bailiwick” (Tomlinson 2009, p. 67). The missionary trod a contradictory path between justifying gods on one hand and denying them on the other, leaving ample space for the old metaphysics and its spirits to exist alongside Christianity, though subordinate to it. This hybrid spiritual world is captured poetically by Tippett (Cited in Tomlinson 2009, p. 67) when he describes in Kadavu:

One can walk round the coastline for a fortnight and never run out of stories and legendary epics and origin myths.... Then suddenly out of this tradition one is immediately confronted by some pastoral issue that shines through in a currently felt spiritual need... One is immersed in a world view not his own; and then strangely one is led back into some strange place in the Old Testament... It is a conflict between black and white magic... The trees one knows, the cleared space, the little formation of stones. One knows that someone has returned to his ‘Canaanite gods’ and that the pastor or the catechist in this next village has to deal with it... You stop saying ‘This is just superstition’.

One can feel in this passage the ongoing tension between two metaphysics, theologies, and competing worldviews. Their very contestation confirms their co-presence and hybridisation. With the almost total Christianisation of the *iTaukei* population the question is how these views toward Nature related to the *iTaukei* view that preceded it? How do they blend in this hybrid today? And how do the answers to these questions affect the ‘response-ability’ (Haraway 2008)⁴ of Fiji’s people in view of climate change ecological and social impacts?

⁴Haraway (2008) describes ‘response-ability’ from an ethical and political standpoint that is deeply implicated and entangled with the ways we engage, know and be in the world. Haraway suggests the reshaping of relations in terms of actors’ (human and nonhuman) capacity to respond and attune to each other. In this sense, being ‘response-able’ to climate change also takes on a metaphysical dimension.

The dominant conceptions of nature in the Judeo-Christian tradition reveals a single real nature (Williams 1980; Cronnon 1995). Amongst other attributes, this conception of nature asserts the human dominion over the rest of the material world as a moral right (Strang 2017). Similar values are found to underly some of the common approaches to climate change mitigation and even adaptation strategies such as ‘payment for ecosystem services’ or carbon trading. This ontological base of man’s assumed dominion over nature (Brincat and Gerber 2015; Castree 2005, 2012; Escobar 1999; Gerber 2019) is the root of many of the problems contributing to climate change (Moore 2016, and importantly for an argument on religion see Berry 1988). There are a number of studies that have compared religions to ascertain the link between environmental concerns and belief-systems. In terms of Christian beliefs, White’s (1967) famous claim that the Judeo-Christian tradition has promoted anthropocentric attitudes and environmentally destructive behaviours has been confirmed by a number of contemporary studies (Taylor et al. 2016). There are range of reasons for this: Christian anthropocentrism and the desacralization of nature observed in Genesis; scepticism of science (including climate science) as denying Biblical truth; humanity’s dominion over Nature bequeathed by God. Of course, there are counter-hegemonic discourses within Christianity also, such as man’s stewardship of Nature, “creation care” and Liberation Theology to name but few. These, however, are subordinate discourses at best. Hand and Van Liere (1984) showed how religiously conservative Christian traditions (e.g., Baptists and Mormons) were more likely to endorse the idea of mastery over nature than liberal denominations (e.g., Episcopal and Methodist) that have “a value orientation compatible with the demands of a limited world” (Hand and Van Liere 1984, p. 568). Greeley (1993) has shown Catholics were just as likely as non-Christians to support environmental spending. However, other studies show religious views are a weak predictor of environmental attitudes (Boyd 1999), and others show it is the more secular a person the “more pro-environment” they tend to be (Guth et al. 1995, p. 377; Roser-Renouf et al. 2016). As Taylor (2015) surmises, the hope that religions may come to ‘the environmental rescue’ requires careful scrutiny.

If these findings are indicative for Fiji, it throws additional complexities when it comes to metaphysics in practice, specifically human-Nature relationships. The predominance of Christianity may imply a dissonance between it and the capacity of the traditional *iTaukei* notion of spirit for dealing with environmental problems. That is, given that the vast majority of ethnic Fijians identify as Christian may impede the pro-environmental *iTaukei* traditions. As an exemplar, Currenti et al. (2019) have documented how after Cyclone Winston residents of an interior village worked towards making buildings more resilient with government and NGO support. Importantly, they showed how the “belief in the Bible and Divine providence” was “a factor influencing attitudes towards dealing with changes in climate and socioeconomic conditions” (Currenti et al. 2019, p. 74). They identified the problem of those that relied “exclusively on divine intervention to save them from the impacts of climate change” and the potential to “undermine cooperative inclinations” between church denominations (Currenti et al. 2019, p. 74) Yet, at the same time, with Methodists predominating across the archipelago—a denomination that studies elsewhere have

shown has a more pro-environmental stance in comparison to other Christian derivations such as Baptist or Mormons (Hand and Van Liere 1984)—may provide a counterweight to this. At the most basic level, the importance of Christian metaphysics to existing *iTaukei* society would suggest the need to have churches included in the formation of climate policy and its communication/dissemination (Luetz and Nunn 2020; Nunn 2013). For example, having the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF) (which covers about around 50% of the population) support could be a significant driver for adaptation messaging. Regardless of such opportunities, the issue highlights that a survey of religious attitudes to the environment and climate change in Fiji needs to be undertaken to understand this linkage more precisely. Nunn and colleagues' (2016) study offers a primer for this, showing that the majority of church attendees across the Pacific have spiritual values that explain their feelings of connectedness to Nature. How these views differ between each denomination and *iTaukei* community, how these relate to other faith-based systems across Fiji, and how they differ across environmental issues, all need to be determined.

Vanua must also be read in the context of land ownership (which is its literal translation), with all the historical antecedents, both traditional and colonial, and the metaphysical contestations of property, territory, community (etc.) as well. This is even more relevant considering that almost 80% of land in Fiji is currently owned under communal titles (Iati 2009) and managed under customary principles of governance (Scheyvens and Russell 2012) that, in effect, directly impact peoples' capacities to respond to climate changes (see for example Gharbaoui and Blocher 2016). As we have seen, ancestral spirits are concerned primarily with the prosperity and continuity of the *yavusa* which includes agricultural land, forest land, and fishing areas owned communally by those people descended from a recognised common ancestor (Parke 2014). But this was not necessarily the traditional view. This system, like the hybridisation of the metaphysics related to spirit, was a result of contestation between Fijian traditions, the chiefly elite, and the new colonial power emerging in the 19th Century. It is important to note that along with the spiritual and religious shifts in Fiji at this time came also the entanglements of economic and political ambitions not just of the European missionaries but the commercial interests of the planters, and, the concerns of the Crown's administration (Sutton 2005). With them came the notions of property, land tenure, and the market that have their own metaphysical basis that were essentially Lockean and stadial at the time (and remain so). The Lockean view of property held that land had to worked to be alienable was clearly a key assumption behind The Native Lands Commission and lay behind the interests of the planters too. This conception of land was far removed from notions of ancestry and spirit that had no bearing on ownership in terms of this metaphysic of land and its alienability. Indeed, traditions had to be created and reintegrated back into this system by Governor Gordon and the chiefs to ensure some land was left for the Fijians (France 1966). Gordon's stadial view of history held that Fijians remained at a pre-feudal level of development and had reached the stage when the inalienability of land was deemed an essential feature of its progress (if not for their very survival). Gordon therefore made "traditional inalienability" central to his theory of Fijian land tenure (France 1966, p. 236). This was based, not only on the insistence of the chiefs

who would profit from it, but also a particular reading of Fijian history by a range of anthropologists at the time. In particular, Fison held that the voice of the people (commoners) represented ancient law “made by the ancestors of the people, who were their gods,” under which all lands were traditionally owned by *mataqali* and were, according to this “immemorial” custom, “inalienable” (France 1966, p. 236). This ‘version’ of history continued despite the fact that the Commission soon found alienation of land had been a common practice among Fijians before colonisation. In the late 1880s the Council of Chiefs revealed “complete confusion among the chiefs as to the names of social divisions and units of ownership.” Nevertheless, they claimed the *mataqali* (the clan-level) was a “firm, and ancient, and understood by everyone” and to prevent disputes within the *mataqali* these lands were to be “subdivided into family land, to be held according to hereditary succession, and that registration of these lands should convey the legal ownership” (France 1966, p. 209).

Metaphysical systems related to land and property were manipulated on all sides by elite interests: chiefs, planters, and colonial administrators, leading to the hybridised tradition that underpins the land system that prevails today. In what France calls (1966, p. 300) “the classical exposition of Fijian social structure,” it was claimed that the *yavusa* consisted of the direct agnate descendants of a single ancestor god, whose sons became the founders of component *mataqali*. The Fijian ‘paramouncy of interests’ doctrine that prohibited further sales of land (although it could be leased) was developed on this basis. Gordan adapted the *yasana* as an administrative unit to correspond with traditional *matanitū*, the major socio-political confederations (see Routledge 1985). So, the land remained with the clan, under hierarchical chieftainship, though increasingly turned toward commercial usage, shifting from subsistence agriculture and household production to those more amenable to foreign commercial and imperial interests. Demarcating ownership through the *mataqali* meant larger tracts of land could be leased, something of keen importance to both the planters and commercial interests of the Crown. Regardless of whether this was in accordance with traditional Fijian life or not, this view became the bedrock of hybridisation of land, tradition, and ongoing native title. By 1914, the Governor could threaten that if *mataqali* or *tokatoka* (family unit that are part of a *mataqali*) did not appear before the Native Lands Commission it would be considered landless, and land without such an owner would become government owned (France 1966). In the end, rather than attempting to discover the ‘traditional’ system of land ownership, the commission simply constructed one by cherry-picking that most suited for its purposes, and then sought going about recording the *mataqali* boundaries. This system has since become “hallowed and sacrosanct,” “a protective device” of the “Fijian ethos” though it “depends less on its historical accuracy than on its social significance” (France 1966, p. 312). For Walter (1978, p. 351), this is a dual system, imposed by a “simplified, administratively modelled organisation... at considerable variance locally with the pre-existing version”. The fact that the constitutional crises of 2009 reaffirmed this system, only seeking to clarify land boundaries is telling (see Fijian Government 2010).

To this date, the customary systems of land tenure are perceived as a hindrance to ‘development’ (economic) championed by neoliberal and Eurocentric logics that

see in individual land holdings the best way to develop a territory (Fingleton 2005; Scheyven and Russell 2012). They have also played a peculiar function in protecting the metaphysics of spirit in *iTaukei* lands also. That is, despite the rupture involved in the change from traditional to colonised peoples, and the contrived retrofit of land law to *iTaukei* practices, the land policy and the *yasana* administrative unit ensured the ‘old gods’—located in the ancestral lands and natural places of each group—were never lost. Arguably, more so than Christianity’s uneasy ‘confirmation by subordination’ of local gods and ancestral spirits, it was these colonial land reforms that kept aspects of the traditional metaphysics alive though in hybridised form (and arguably in ways unrecognisable to *iTaukei* culture now largely lost to history). The spirit world was always there and remained so, subordinate but *not* subsumed to Christianity or Crown lands. In the next section, we will see how this hybrid metaphysical system has influenced the more recent policies concerning climate change adaptation in Fiji.

Disconnects Between Vanua and Climate Change Policies in Fiji

In Fiji, top-down climate change action is driven by political measures and strategies that are often aligned with the global discourses of development, sustainability, and resilience – key components of what has elsewhere been described as the ‘economic rationalist’ discourse on climate change (Pascoe et al. 2019). Such elements come in a package and cannot be disassociated from supposedly global conceptions of Nature, what society is, or how religion and spirituality are to be located (Latour 2017). These functional assumptions of economic rationalism have their roots in the human/Nature binary inherent to Western and Christian metaphysics, already discussed, and the hierarchical relationship between humans and Nature that they assume. As such, they seem widely at odds with the deep relationalism of *vanua* especially in terms of ongoing processes of recognition/respect owed to ancestors and spirit in *iTaukei* communities.

One of the most obvious examples of this tension between *vanua* and climate policy is found in the Republic of Fiji National Climate Change Policy (2018–2030).⁵ This legislation follows directly from Western (and Judeo-Christian traditions) ideals expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015a) and the Paris Agreement (United Nations 2015b). It focuses on discourses of development, sustainability, and resilience that largely ignore alternative worldviews/metaphysics that frame human-Nature relation as reciprocal, thereby restricting the capacity of *iTaukei* to respond to climate change. At the same time, it locks in adaptation policy to external systems of validation. For example, Fiji’s current National Climate Change Policy is supported via investments and financial resources that together complement

⁵The Republic of Fiji National Climate Change Policy 2018–2030 replaces the previous policy launched in 2012.

Fiji's aspirations to develop and build resilience. These rely on international aid and a recently established (2017) National Green Bond to finance its endeavours to face climate change and which have been commended for their efforts to achieve a sustainable financial base (Anantharajah 2019). The links to the overriding economic rationalist discourse are here obvious.

A more complex example of the disconnection to *vanua* within The Policy is the dominance of the themes of 'resilient development' as the pathway to follow in planning and responding to climate change. The Policy furthers Fiji's commitments in relation to achieving inclusive socio-economic development, on the premise that such development cannot happen without addressing climate change concerns. Outlining a "woven approach" to climate change and resilient development, the policy recognises the importance of the connections between the many factors that contribute to climate change, adaptation and resilience. The Policy therefore acknowledges Fiji's need to strengthen its actions to achieve climate change goals, but also the importance of promoting ways geared towards transformation of multiple sectors (e.g. transitioning to 100% renewable electricity by 2030). Yet, The Policy defines resilience as "the ability to cope with shocks and disturbance with minimal disruption and successfully return to a stable state" (Republic of Fiji 2018, p. 17). In other words, resilience is the ability of Fiji, its people and ecosystems to 'bounce-back' *after* climate shocks and disturbances. This definition arguably adheres to the most common vocabulary used in policy instruments on resilience and climate (Davidson et al. 2016). It is grounded on the premises of development and economic growth emanating from dominant ideas in the technocratic worldview perspective that antagonises humans and Nature. This definition, however, has been widely criticised for its instrumentalism regarding how to act and respond in order to create resilience (Cretney 2014). By articulating policy in terms of the capacity of socio-ecological systems to 'bounce-back', policy and actions are focused on the social factors that might contribute to returning functionality to particular (and probably damaged) institutions and structures (Cote and Nightingale 2012). This does not take into account how responding to climate change is enmeshed within broader categories such as the environment, economics, spirituality and religion at the local level. Nor does it adequately account for how some climatic changes, such as rising sea levels, may impact on ancestral lands and spirits worlds in ways which prevent these communities to return to a 'stable state'. Moreover, such instrumentalist approach to policy may be trading political expediency for effectiveness by challenging long-term values related to *vanua* and by restructuring the environment and society to accommodate new, external definitions of what is desirable or appropriate adaptation (Cote and Nightingale 2012; Cretney 2014). To the degree these adaptation mechanisms do not mesh with local interests, belief-systems, or community needs they will remain ineffective.

Fiji's Climate Change Bill, proposed in 2019 (hereafter The Bill), is the Fiji Government's most recent legislative proposal articulating its intentions related to

climate change. Though in draft form, it shows a greater—though still limited—acknowledgement of themes more consistent with *vanua*. The Bill provides a regulatory framework to support the planning, development and implementation of long-term climate policies and actions to protect Fiji’s people and their territories in view of the climate change emergency. The Bill is embedded in the context of international obligations set by the Paris Agreement. Divided into seventeen (17) parts, The Bill is wide ranging in its implications but also in its aspirations. From establishing legislative guides for research, defining commitments and obligations for climate change mitigation, to formulating mechanisms for engagement and financing that will support climate change governance mechanisms and arrangements, The Bill impacts all sectors of Fiji. The Bill is comprehensive, and its overall intent is to establish ways in which Fiji can mitigate its own climate change impacts, while promoting responses, adaptation, and resilience to climate change. The Bill lays the foundations for a future act that will shape institutional and governance arrangements which will permit Fiji’s institutional response to climate change through national legislation.

Perhaps most importantly, the ‘Principles’ make direct reference for the recognition of the *iTaukei* (and the Rotumans) including “their respective ownership” of *iTaukei* lands and Rotuman “lands, their unique culture, customs, traditions and language” (Article 5(i)). It refers to traditional knowledge, and *iTaukei* needs in terms of mitigation and adaptation. Moreover, Article 81 recognises traditional knowledge of the *iTaukei* and Rotumans and the multi-cultural and multi-faith composition of the Fijian population. This recognition is more hortatory than real, however, as it makes no mention of the traditional land ownership forms (outlined above) that would seem fundamental for implementing this type of policy at the local level. The *iTaukei* Land Trust Board and Act (1940) and Register of leases is referred to and must give consent in terms of strategies related to REDD+ programmes and sequestration rights but this is not outlined in greater detail. The institutional and governance structures that the act aims to create (identified in Article 4(d)) should be consistent with *vanua* and land systems. Part 4, on ‘Governance’, is a real missed opportunity because rather than affirming local traditions, it adopts a hierarchical approach of Ministerial powers, with a Head of the Climate Change and International Cooperation Division, and Inspectors rather than an emphasis on local, bottom-up mechanisms of consultation. The National Climate Change Coordination Committee makes no mention of interactions with local communities other than a vague power to make “consultative groups as required” (13(j)), which seem again the prerogative of the head rather than emanating from the community. This leads to many questions around the objective of climate resilience and enhancing adaptive capacity in respect to Fiji’s environment and ecosystems (Article 4(m)) if they are not tethered to the conditions or needs of local communities. For example, The Bill aims to provide “for the relocation and rights of at-risk communities” but these rights are not determined clearly and the surrounding text of the act seems more concerned with relocation than wider notions of human rights (especially of the collective community). The language of its principles (Article 5) are all made in the terminology of international instruments on climate change and not in terms of *vanua* that could be a complementary, shared narrative. For example, principles of intergenerational equity (Article 5(c)) could

be made in reference to ancestral spirits, local Natural and sites of cultural significance, and community norms regarding past and future generations, that would then resonate across both discourses.

As legal instruments, both the Climate Change Bill 2019 and the National Climate Change Policy embody an alien conception of Nature to that of *iTaukei* metaphysics. The referent of security is the nation-state (Article 4(p)) that eschews any wider notion of bringing in climate change as part of an ecological security framework, in which *vanua* could be more centrally placed. Ontologically speaking, this resonates with the ideas of a Nature that can be managed and controlled, serving a purpose to people. For instance, in the context of The Bill, adaptation is defined as the “adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects which moderates harm or exploits *beneficial opportunities*” (p. 6, emphasis added). In this technocratic approach, although implicit, the subjects of such benefits are solely human. Oceans are the only thing that are offered as a separate area worthy as being an objective of “consideration” (Article 4(o) but are then subsequently reduced to an anthropocentric lens in the principle of (Article 5(j) where the ocean is defined merely as “critical to identity and livelihood of Fijians.” Whilst an important concession seemingly recognising the relationship between people and the environment in ways more than just economic, it does not reflect Nature in its own terms. Similarly, The Policy through its ‘woven approach’, explicitly accepts the tight “relationship between social and ecological systems and that human prosperity is dependent on environmental integrity and health” (Republic of Fiji 2018, p. 40). By centring on the economic, it lacks acknowledgement of the intertwined “spiritual and emotional understandings of belonging to the land in space and time” (Ryle 2005, p. 73) of *iTaukei* communities. Whilst The Policy further states the need to “ensure that all development actions adequately address the impacts, linkages and dependencies between human wellbeing, ecosystem services, biodiversity, oceanic systems, and the global climate” (p. 41), it gives the false impression of a socio-ecological arrangement in which spiritual and metaphysical constructs are absent. In this technocratic approach, the subjects of any benefits are solely human, making invisible the relations between *vanua*, territory, Nature and spirituality.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have argued for a better understanding and recognition of metaphysics, as they relate to culture, everyday life, and importantly in the context of this book, to religious belief, faith and spirituality. We have shown how existing and proposed policy frameworks related to climate change adaptation largely operate outside many of these factors. Exploring the metaphysical grounds and discourses associated with climate change policy in Fiji, we emphasise the way in which policy instruments are reliant on a discourse lacking content that speaks to the belief systems that are fundamental in *iTaukei* society (Luetz and Nunn 2020). These policy measures are bound to a set of principles that are focused on hard measures (such

as development of infrastructure and new energy networks), notions of sustainable development, and resilience that, while important, overlook critical variables within the philosophical and cultural systems of the *iTaukei* (and other Fijians) that could otherwise contribute to effective and sustainable climate change adaptation (McNamara et al. 2020). These policies are also framed within a particular metaphysical conception in which humans are disconnected from Nature, a Western view that contrasts markedly with that of most Fijians. The consequence is that such climate change policies cannot leverage social institutions and their metaphysical basis that could potentially allow for more effective climate management and governance interventions (Chandler 2014). *Vanua* must be leveraged: its interconnection of Nature, and ancestor spirits, are powerful tools for group action and adaptation to climate change and a more consistent appreciation of this metaphysical system within policy may help develop more socially relevant adaptation strategies. The metaphysical dimensions in *Vanua*, together with the associated everyday practices it entails, have the potential to redefine climate change responses and adaptation. These could trigger ethical, political and knowledge practices bearing the onus of a convivial and relational practice cognisant of the entanglement between the social and ecological worlds.

Our argument about the importance of metaphysical basis in the creation and delivery of policies, is relevant elsewhere. Indeed, Fiji's colonial history, processes of hybridisation, and metaphysical systems are unique but find parallels in other communities that could make for future comparative research. Climate change adaptation is spatially mediated, but its consequences will be global, crossing political and cultural boundaries, straddling belief systems and worldviews. A heightened attention to metaphysical bases of those outside Western-centric worldviews, should be hermeneutically understood if successful climate change adaptation is sought for those who need it most. We believe that these are sufficient grounds to develop a research agenda that works not only toward the understanding of metaphysical basis as they relate to spirituality, everyday action and climate change, but also works towards deciphering how to better apply this knowledge into policy making and practice.

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