

Critical Community Language Policies in Education: Solomon Islands Case

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“The community has been the incubator of indigenous resistance... But resistance is not an end, it is a means [to] achieve a people’s own form of liberation.” Maldonado Alvarado (2010, p. 369).

“Our community is not concerned with formal school curriculum and accreditation right now. We have hundreds of youth back on Malaita, we must do something before they return to Honiara in a deluge. The first thing is schools. Schools where nobody fails because learning is not measured by tests, but by lived experience, transformation, and empowerment – as in our indigenous ways of teaching. Where everybody learns literacy in their own language and English, and to critically analyze what is going on in the Solomons now, to prepare youth to build a life for themselves. The secondary school we’re building in South Malaita is for basic education that these youth had no access to in the *Tenson* period.” Tetehano, former secondary principal (interviewed by Gegeo on 10 May 2015).

We live in an era of accelerating sociopolitical change, linguistic complexity, disappearing indigenous languages, and population pressures that both unite and divide people in their educational goals. Although national language policies dominate school systems in most countries, increasingly indigenous movements have sought to shape language policy and planning (LPP) at the local level. What are the effects of a shift in educational policy-making

from the national (macro) level to the community (micro) level? How are macro- and micro-level concerns negotiated? Critical community language policy and planning in education (CCLPE) focuses on these and related questions, and is an interdisciplinary strand of research bringing together scholars in applied linguistics, anthropology, education, ethnic studies, and rural development theory.

The origins of CCLPE, as an area of study and methodological approach, coincide with the turn to critical approaches and ethnography in the early 1980s. Critical approaches situate differential positioning of languages in a society as “a manifestation of asymmetrical power relations based on social structures and ideologies” (Ricento, 2006, p. 15), especially between national government institutions vis-à-vis communities and indigenous populations. Thus CCLPE researchers, working at the community level, necessarily need to understand specific situations in detail. By the middle 1980s, they adopted ethnographic research methods and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study community language issues and analyze in-depth interviews with teachers and other educational stakeholders at the local level.

Several of the terms important to this chapter are illustrated in the opening quotations. Maldonado Alvarado, well-known Mexican anthropologist, has carried out critical ethnographic educational research for 30 years in rural Oaxaca. He addresses resistance, that is, local people resisting asymmetrical power relations with the national government that would obliterate their indigenous language. His work illustrates community autonomy grounded in place, culture and language among indigenous people that have experienced loss of land to agribusiness and the undermining of their languages through nationally imposed Spanish-only schools. For these people, resistance is not just a refusal to comply with national policies; it is a group’s assertion of their agency in shaping the language policy process, and therefore a form of liberation.

The second quotation, from educator Robert Tetezano, describes a secondary school that he and his community are building in South Malaita, Solomon Islands (SI). The curriculum of the school is rooted in indigenous epistemology. Indigenous epistemology and critical praxis are ancient constituents of what we term *deep culture* in SI societies (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 2004). Indigenous epistemology refers to “a cultural group’s ways of thinking and of creating, reformulating, and theorizing about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of the discourse in culture” and experience (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001, p. 58). Indigenous critical praxis refers to “people’s own critical reflection” on culture, history, knowledge, politics, economics, language(s), and the “sociopolitical contexts in which they are living,” and then acting on these critical reflections (p. 60). Tetezano’s goal parallels Freire’s (1970, 1994) literacy for critical consciousness and empowerment, and is shared by many SI communities, especially now in the aftermath of the ethnic conflict (see below). His use of the terms *experience*, *transformation*, and *empowerment* are direct English translations of words for these concepts in indigenous SI languages.

In the sections that follow, we first offer a brief overview of CCLPE, including engaged language policy (ELP), whereby many CCLPE researchers choose to work in communities as allies and learners, “engaging [community members] in critical dialogue as a life-changing process” (Davis, 2014a, p. 91). Then we turn to an example of CCLPE via our work in SI, focusing primarily on Malaita, in the wake of the *Tenson* (ethnic conflict) between Guadalcanal and Malaita (1998-2007). The political and social fall-out from that period reverberates in multiple ways now that RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to SI), a United Nations-style military intervention led by Australia and New Zealand and sent to SI in 2003, substantially withdrew in 2013 (Fraenkel, Madraiwiwi & Okole, 2014), and finally exited June 30, 2017

(Dobell, 2017, p. 1), leaving an uncertain future for the Solomons. We contextualize our analysis of the evolving educational situation of post-conflict Malaita by tracing the turning points for LPP in SI history. Our analysis is based on work by the first two authors on critical ELP with Kwara'ae people in Malaita since 1978, and Fito'o's (2016) completed doctoral research on current community educational initiatives in Malaita. Gegeo and Fito'o are both indigenous Kwara'ae.

Finally, we discuss implications of the SI case for community LPP and the future of education in SI. While acknowledging the continuity between the institutional policies of SI as a modern nation-state, we focus on local processes of uncertainty and instability in times of sudden or rapid social change that have served to undermine community faith in the nation-state. We show through our case study that indigenous communities have learned over time that they can exert their agency to shape LPP from the bottom-up, and that they recognize that the shaping must be grounded in indigenous language(s) and culture(s). This argument is not new, but it is consistent with the call for epistemological and ontological diversity that is increasingly being advanced in development theory, education, and related studies internationally (Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Pallas, 2001; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2013b).

Paradigm Shifts in LPP

The scholarly study of LPP has been characterized over the past few decades by dramatic theoretical shifts, motivated by the rapid changes of globalization, neoliberalism, and hybridization in a world of superdiversity (the latter referring to the proliferation of language varieties and ethnic populations, especially through migration) (Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert &

Rampton, 2011). These processes have affected most areas of the world, but often in differential ways. The shift away from conventional LPP models toward critical studies (Tollefson, 2006, 2013; Pennycook, 2001), ethnographic methods (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007), and ELP (Davis, 2014b) has challenged previous assumptions about agency in impoverished and politically disempowered communities. The degree to which linguistic minority populations can influence decision-making at the regional or national level, or undertake local-level LPP, is affected by many processes, including sometimes unanticipated changes in national policy (Zhang, 2013).

In the earlier conventional paradigm formulated under modernization theory, *unplanned LPP* refers to local-level LPP. The assumption is that although community efforts may serendipitously produce favorable results, they often undermine official, national-level plans and policies (Baldauf, 1994). Modernization theory, which shaped development in decolonizing societies from the post-World War II era until recently, gave rise to national LPP, whereby the nation-state tasks its agencies with adopting a standard national language and/or promoting one or more international languages. These macro-level decisions are typically made with the help of expatriate professionals, but little community input. The research focus of this neoclassical model (Tollefson, 1991) is on learner variables, downplaying social, cultural, and political context. Individual learner variables are taken as the key measure for the success of LPP, the assimilation of linguistic minorities into a national or international language is assumed necessary, and little serious attention is paid to issues of minority identity.

In the 1980s-1990s, critical scholars challenged the previously assumed political ‘neutrality’ of LPP assumptions based on modernization theory. They argued that the conventional LPP framework was “detrimental to the development of equitable language policies in complex multilingual settings” (Ricento, 2006, p. 14). The resulting shift of

perspective to power and inequality led researchers to examine the “impact of coercive policies on language learning and language behavior” (Tollefson, 2013, p. 26). If we ask why an individual chooses to speak a particular language, we prioritize “the social, political and economic factors [that] constrain or impel changes” in language structure and use (Tollefson, 1991, p. 7).

Modernization theory and the earlier conventional LPP model that emphasized macro-structural economic and linguistic planning seemed to point the way to success and prosperity for poor societies. But by the 1980s, the realization of the importance of micro-structural processes in education was driven by the failure of Eurocentric modernization theory to deliver on its promises for development. The dramatic historical changes brought by late capitalism, globalization, wars rooted in colonial history, and migration radically altered places where LPP professionals work. Tollefson (2013, p. 28) argues that the shift to a “relatively creative public sphere paradigm” emphasizes “the agency of all actors in the policy-making process,” despite the “coercive and deterministic” circumstances in which they live. This shift is illustrated by the rise of ethnography, CCLPE, and ELP.

The rise of ethnography, also referred to as the ‘ethnographic turn,’ includes the use of critical ethnographic theory and method, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and a concern with linking micro and macro levels of analysis in order to produce ‘thick explanation’. The ethnographic turn, articulated in Hornberger & Johnson’s (2007; 2011) proposal for an ethnography of language policy (2011, p. 273), emerged from work in the 1980s, maturing in the 1990s (Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Hornberger, 1988; Davis, 1994; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1992). Ethnography involves a “commitment to taking a long hard look at empirical processes that make no sense within established frameworks” (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011, p. 10). Critical

ethnography (Madison, 2012; Carspecken, 1996) integrated with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA; Van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 2010) is essential for relating micro-level interaction to macro-level social organization, and moving beyond ‘thick description’ to ‘thick explanation’ (Watson-Gegeo, 1992).

As a result of this shift in LPP research, community LPP studies have multiplied since the early 2000s (see Canagarajah, 2004 and Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012). Kamwendo (2005) points out that many of these studies (including his in Northern Malawi) constitute ‘language planning from below’ that emerges from grassroots activism rather than decisions by the state authorities. Moreover, local agents such as teachers are often the instigators of change, as in Nero’s (2013) study of de facto language education policy in Jamaica, and Coelho and Henze’s (2013) in rural Nicaragua (see Menken & Garcia, 2010).

Davis (2014a, p. 83) describes ELP as “grounded in critical theory and informed by political activism.” She argues that “[m]oving towards the local suggests acknowledging not only traditions, but also innovation that realistically meets situated socioeconomic traditions” (pp. 83-84). Moreover, “[t]he practice of ELP, first and foremost, means focusing on the centrality of [researchers] engaging in critical dialogue as a life-changing process” with community members, teachers, and educational officials (pp. 91-92). Such a research program is exemplified especially by Davis and her co-researchers’ work with teachers and youth in Nepal (Davis, Phyak, & Bui, 2012; Phyak & Bui, 2013).

We turn now to the specific case of community LPP in Malaita, SI, where Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo have conducted CCLPE as engaged researchers undertaking critical dialogue with villagers and teachers since the late 1970s, and Fito‘o (2016) recently. In the following section, we examine historical crises and turning points in LPP leading to and including the present,

addressing how Malaitans have responded and continue to respond to current fluid social conditions at the national level, by building educational programs through critical community effort at the local level.

Critical Community LPP in Malaita

Located in the Western Pacific, SI consists of six major and hundreds of smaller islands and atolls grouped into nine provinces with 70 indigenous languages, the official language of English, and the lingua franca SI Pijin (SIP), spoken in a total population of 550,000 (UNESCAP, 2013). Malaita Province is home to 27% of the nation's population, and 10-13 indigenous languages (see Solomon Islands Population and Housing Census, c.2010). Our focus is on the two main islands: Malaita, and at its southeastern tip, separated by a narrow ocean strait, South Malaita. Most of our data come from Kwara'ae, the indigenous language/culture with the largest number of speakers in the Solomons.

In the sub-sections below, we address historical crises and turning points for LPP on Malaita: missionization/colonialism, the Maasina Rule movement, modernization and the failure of rural development, the ethnic *Tenson* (conflict)/RAMSI period, and contemporary community initiatives in the post-*Tenson* present. Historical events and struggles over language are important background for understanding the contemporary situation of CCLPE because these events and struggles are still part of oral and written history passed across generations in villages. At the community level, current issues are always contextualized in past experience, thinking, and debates by participants in village meetings where decisions are made.

These meetings take place in high rhetoric, the formal discourse register of the Kwara'ae language. Even when speakers fail to command the intricacies of high rhetoric register, they attempt to follow the speaking style and structure of it. High rhetoric is semantically complex, involving a large, rich lexicon of abstract terms with subtle distinctions for discussing concepts and ideas. In critical discussion and debate, participants dialogically deconstruct and reconstruct history and planning, using a variety of named epistemological strategies that guide logical reasoning and the presentation of evidence (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001, 2002, 2013b). It is through such traditional epistemological strategies that villagers draw lessons from the past and relate them to current circumstances and educational needs. In the case of CCLPE, the meetings and interviews we recorded cover five generations.

CCLPE During Missionization and Early Colonialism

In the 1870s, several thousand islanders (primarily Malaitans) were taken, willingly on contract or forcibly by kidnapping (termed *blackbirding*), to work on plantations in colonial Australia (Bennett, 1987; Akin, 2013). There, Malaitans gained a reputation for hard work, stamina, and resistance to authority. The majority returned home when plantations began to be established on Guadalcanal (1880s-1890s). Returnees brought back an English-based pidgin created on plantations that by the 1970s evolved into SIP, the lingua franca creole of today. Many also brought the South Sea Evangelical Mission (now Church, SSEC) formed by white missionaries on the plantations. During their years of plantation labor in Queensland, some islanders learned English, which they used to protest living conditions and contract terms (Watson-Gegeo, 1987). Back home on Malaita, in village meetings they shared their observations of white/European life,

values, abuse of workers, racism and protest. Villagers began to realize the potential power of acquiring English to push back against colonialism. However, because access to western education and English was very limited at the time, traditional education continued in formal meetings and mentoring, using indigenous languages (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1990).

When the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) was declared in 1893 missionization was already underway, having begun in 1848 with the establishment of the Melanesian Mission, Anglican (now Church of Melanesia, CM). A variety of other Christian denominations soon established missions throughout the Solomons. Although colonization was justified by the British as ‘pacification,’ to end what was claimed to be constant warfare among tribes, it was instead aimed primarily at protecting missionaries and stopping German claims on the island chain (Bennett, 1987).

For many decades, the Anglican church exercised the primary influence on how schools developed in Malaita (Hilliard, 1978). From the beginning, the “vexing language question” (Whiteman, 1983, p. 180) was debated in the clergy and community: Which language (English or local indigenous languages) should be the medium of instruction in classrooms? Some supported English as the language of colonial administration, business, and “secular knowledge,” arguing that such knowledge would be essential to islanders’ future participation in the larger world (Hilliard, 1978, p. 204). Others supported indigenous languages, for children’s depth and ease of understanding, and literacy development in their native language. Eventually, English became the official language for government, business, and schooling. Kwara‘ae villagers used the term *sukulu* (from English ‘school’) to refer to western education (including missionary church services), which they saw as different from traditional education (*fa‘amanata‘anga*, formal teaching in high rhetoric Kwara‘ae that would create *ngwae ali‘afu*, a ‘complete person’).

However, for several decades before and after World War II, a division in attitudes towards westernization grew between members of the SSEC (supportive) and CM (invested in traditional culture) (see Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo's [1991] discussion of language attitudes, discourse patterns, and linguistic differences by church affiliation in the late 1980s). The few village children who attended school, typically for 1-3 years, did learn some English. They transferred their literacy skills to Kwara'ae, and taught non-schooled children and adults to read and write Kwara'ae, using early orthographies developed by missionaries. Literacy skills in Kwara'ae meant that families could stay in touch with relatives working in plantations on Guadalcanal and elsewhere.

At the end of this historical period, villagers' critical community discussions acknowledged the overwhelming power of the colonial military police. When resistance to colonial policies (such as taxation of impoverished villagers) sporadically erupted at the local level, the British response was stern military retaliation, imprisonment, and executions (Laracy, 1983; Keesing & Corris, 1980; Fox, 1967). Treatment of workers on island plantations was also harsh. Villagers had aspirations for improving their situations, but possibilities of doing so were very limited.

Village experience of English from the early colonial period was that English was the language of government, police, nurses/doctors, and missions. As communities realized that a measure of power and ability to enter more fully into the growing cash economy depended on going to school, villagers turned to making decisions about who should go to school. Missions did not provide free education, and tuitions were high given village poverty. At the community level, critical discussion focused on keeping an oldest son and daughter at home, to be immersed in Kwara'ae language and traditional knowledge; the son would become head of the kin unit

later in life. It was decided that at least one younger sibling would be sent to school. That decision was sometimes made on the basis of which younger child of a kin group seemed most apt to do well in school, and then group resources would be invested in that child. Children who went to school would learn English and western knowledge, obtain a job in a colonial service, and then help support the larger family or kin group. 'Support' involved helping to pay the government 'head tax' on each adult male, and contributing to school tuitions for a sibling or relative. Critical praxis at this time aimed to share linguistic and monetary resources within communities, and balance the demands of a colonial world with traditional culture.

World War II, the Maasina Rule Movement, and nascent community LPP

World War II brought many changes to the Solomons. As Bennett (1978, p. 19) aptly expresses it, WWII "shattered and totally destroyed the order of the white planters' world." Islanders' lives and perspectives were dramatically changed by the experiences of seeing the British retreat in front of advancing Japanese. The American military invasion beginning with the Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942 revealed the horror of artillery, bombs, and mass slaughter in modern warfare. Malaitans (especially) were recruited by the British to join the Labour Corps, to serve in the war effort as soldiers, scouts, and carriers. Working side by side with Americans, islanders were impressed by the American soldiers' generosity and willingness to treat them as equals (unlike the British), as well as their support for Islanders' intentions to free themselves from British rule, as had the Americans before them (White, Gegeo, Akin, & Watson-Gegeo, 1988). Moreover, as British colonial leaders fled Guadalcanal during the invasion, islanders felt that the

British had abandoned them, in contrast to the Americans who came to rescue and fight beside them.

After the war, inspired by WWII experiences, in 1946 the Maasina Rule movement formed on Malaita and spread to Guadalcanal. Maasina Rule was both a cultural revitalization and a political independence movement (Worsley, 1968). Malaita had long been considered the “most politically fragmented island” (Laracy, 1983, p. 6) in the Solomons, because of its multiple languages and cultures. Now Malaitans came together with an island identity (even a “proto-nationalist political” identity; Worsley, 1968, p. 182), whether or not given individuals actually joined the Movement (some pursued a separate path to self-rule from inside the colonial government).

English became the language of protest, generating “a mass of writing” in which islanders “spoke of and for themselves” (Laracy, 1983, pp. 6-7) for the first time. In lengthy community meetings using indigenous debate strategies, Maasina Rule members set up towns and a hierarchical administration, integrating a local view of colonial organization with traditional indigenous governance through chiefs, elders, and priests. The meetings used local Malaita or Guadalcanal languages where possible, and a mix of SIP and English in cross-linguistic situations.

Although the British sought to discredit the movement by planting ‘cargo cult’ ideas into some of its membership, ultimately in 1953 movement leaders succeeded in negotiating with a new resident commissioner the establishment of the first locally-governed Malaita Council (Bennett, 1987, p. 296). Delegates from various political factions on Malaita elected Salana Ga‘a (West Kwara‘ae, a Maasina Rule leader) as the Council’s first President. Thus, Malaitans achieved a significant measure of self-rule through community action (Worsley, 1968). In the

1980s, Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo conducted extensive interviews of surviving Kwara‘ae activists, including Salana Ga‘a, Naphtali Rigamanu, Fr David Ramotalau and others on Maasaina Rule, and David Buamae on the Malaita Council movement. The success of the Malaita Council set the stage for self-governance of the Solomons in 1976, and full independence in 1978. Wanting to divest their expensive colonial possessions, the British were willing to turn the Solomons over to Australian/New Zealand hegemony, and did little to prepare islanders for nationhood.

Nevertheless, for many Malaitans, their resistance and successful struggle for independence was an important experience in the power of community action and in communicating across language differences. As they reviewed their history going back to ‘blackbirding’ days and forward to national independence, they felt optimistic about a future that would truly balance traditional culture and *ala‘anga fanoa* (indigenous language) with English in nation building.

Modernization and the Failure of Rural Development

The end of WWII was the beginning of the rural development era (1960s-1990s), guided by modernization theory. SI was flooded with outside advisors and projects that devalued local cultures. The colonial (and national) government initiated several important development projects. One was the 1960s ‘Asai Demonstration Farm in West Kwara‘ae that dislocated and broke up kin groups originally forming a thriving and ecologically diverse community there (Gegeo, 1994). When ‘Asai Farm failed miserably, the government abandoned it suddenly, leaving behind severe, permanent ecological damage, and great economic loss for local villagers.

‘Asai farm’s destruction injected into villagers’ consciousness the capitalist notion of direct, individual land ownership, leading to many continuing land disputes. None of the development initiatives from government or outside consultants were based in indigenous knowledge or the local environment, and all left behind environmental destruction.

After independence the national government took over control of schools from the missions, mandating English-only instruction. Expatriate teachers were replaced with SI teachers, often from other islands. Government teacher training programs were set up, but a teacher shortage led to the government’s posting individuals categorized as “partially trained” and “untrained” teachers to rural schools, often limiting “fully” trained teachers to more developed urban areas. In the 1970s-1990s, nearly 40% of Malaita’s teachers were untrained and knew very little English, 40% of the children were not in school, 63% of the population had no schooled education, and in many years the national government sent no teaching materials to schools at all (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1994). Not surprisingly, Malaitans had the poorest record of all the Provinces for passing the national examination into secondary school.

Community responses to these conditions were variable. At times delegations of village parents and teachers went to the Provincial headquarters in Auki to seek help in improving schools, arguing for the teaching of English through the use of indigenous languages, but the Province had neither the authority nor resources to help. In some villages, school leavers (with 3-6 years of schooling) set up impromptu lessons on Sunday afternoons to teach younger children who were unschooled or faring poorly in school.

By the 1980s, the deep distrust Malaitans felt toward the colonial government had become re-directed toward the new national government because of its failure to bring meaningful development to rural areas, its astounding level of corruption regarding logging

contracts, bribes and graft, and the growing gap in wealth between government officials in Honiara (the nation's capital on Guadalcanal) and rural villagers. The constant message from government agencies and outsiders that villagers were ignorant, inferior, and needed to give up their cultures and languages in order to 'develop' (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1992, 1995) contributed to community disaffection with government-mandated English-only schooling. From the 1960s-1990s, village families made great sacrifices to pay for one or more of their children to attend school (tuitions sky-rocketed after the government took over the schools). School was still about learning English well in order to get a job, yet jobs were few for graduates, and the great majority of students failed, returning in defeat and shame to live the lives of their parents in their home village. Partly for this reason, young adults with families (in a mid-1980s survey [Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1991]) argued that the most important language in which a Kwara'ae person needed to achieve fluency was high rhetoric Kwara'ae.

The 1980s also was the era of the *kastom* movement, a new cultural revitalization movement that valued indigenous cultures and languages in the wake of failed western-style development. Teachers were actively engaged with communities, pushing for Kwara'ae as the language of instruction in lower grades. The need to develop teaching materials locally was discussed in community meetings. Under pressure by teachers and communities, the national government changed its policy to allow limited code-switching to children's indigenous languages for the sake of understanding. But some teachers in rural schools who had become aware of the international movement promoting bilingual education in the lower grades went further, alternating literacy lessons between English and the local language or Pijin.

Malaitans were called "stubborn and truculent" (Watson-Gegeo, 1987) by British colonial officials, because of the often resistant stance they took toward the colonial protectorate's

institutions and practices. As shown here, we counter-argue that villagers are critical, a quality rooted in their indigenous epistemological processes of creating and examining knowledge to arrive at truth (*mamana'anga*). Their epistemological process led Kwara'ae and other Malaitans to expand their critique of large-scale development.

In 1978, the lead authors of this chapter arrived in West Kwara'ae for the first of nine research trips through the 1980s-1990s, initially to study Kwara'ae children's language socialization and schooling. On arrival we found villagers questioning why development projects and schools fail, and how to ensure the survival of Kwara'ae language and culture. They wanted to engage us on these issues because we were family, members of the tribe and sub-clan of David's home village, and they asked us to participate in village meetings and local gatherings where critical issues are debated. From the intense discussions that went on during and between our visits (many of them audiotaped), we and the villagers together formed an epistemic community that co-constructed the idea of development based on indigenous epistemology. The villagers had the knowledge that through colonialism had been suppressed and devalued. Our coming back to the community (in Gegeo's case) and focusing on indigenous language and knowledge helped villagers recognize the value of what they knew. Our work became ELP (Davis, 2014b).

In the early 1990s villagers went on to create several development projects based on indigenous epistemology. Some of these focused on youth who, finding no employment on Malaita, drifted to the national capital of Honiara (Guadalcanal), where after failing to find jobs, they often became involved in petty crime, contributing to the local reputation of Malaitans as "aggressive" (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2003). Other projects were cross-generational, multi-community efforts to critically debate and reconstruct traditional linguistic and cultural

knowledge (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001). Villagers also continued to press for community input to LPP in the schools, against the refusal of the Ministry of Education to listen.

Ethnic *Tenson* and the RAMSI Period

The ethnic conflict (*Tenson*) began in 1998, when Guadalcanal militants attacked Malaitan settlers and squatters (some legal and some not), burning down houses, beating and killing Malaitans, and driving out legal residents, as well. Resentment against Malaitans was fueled by decades of under-development of rural Guadalcanal, cultural differences, and the perceived ‘aggressiveness’ of Malaitans (Moore, 2007; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2013a), but was also manipulated by business factions for economic gain. From 1998-2000, Malaitan communities on Guadalcanal were under attack, national secondary schools were fired on and evacuated, and by June 2000, 20,000 Malaitans had fled to Malaita, even though many had never even visited the island before. That month, a militia, armed and trained in secret on Malaita, invaded Honiara and overthrew the national government. They demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister and a new election. Once a new Prime Minister was installed, they vacated Guadalcanal.

Yet peace was hard to reestablish, and crime escalated on both islands. Eventually the national government asked Australia for help. RAMSI was posted to the Solomons initially from 2003-2013, tasked with restoring peace, educating the national police force, and promoting nation building. While RAMSI did play a role in preventing new violence until everyone calmed down, a recent independent report on its impact (commissioned by the SI government) (Fraenkel, Madraiwiwi & Okole, 2014) shows that it failed in its aims – especially nation building – and instead left behind a variety of serious social ills often promoted by RAMSI soldiers.

In the meantime on Malaita, the influx of 20,000 people created chaos, with shortages of food, medical supplies, and housing, as well as problems with land rights, crime, guns (which were suddenly numerous), and disruption of peaceful traditional villages. The death rate among village adults rose, due to illnesses, stress, and grief over relatives killed in Guadalcanal. Many returnees did not speak their heritage languages, but rather only SIP or English, and with their urban behaviors, considered themselves superior to rural villagers. In school, children who had grown up in town were ahead in English, spoke only SIP, and ridiculed village children for speaking indigenous languages. During the conflict part of the *Tenson*, most of the ongoing cultural projects came to a halt. Hundreds of village children who were either in secondary school on Guadalcanal (and evacuated to Malaita), or who were scheduled to go there, were suddenly closed out of continuing their education.

Malaita communities felt abandoned by the national government, and the Provincial government was unable to handle the crisis in Auki and other peri-urban areas. The churches stepped in to provide what aid they could, but as villagers told us in interviews, it was really up to villagers themselves to survive the crisis.

The *Tenson* period led to a major paradigm shift, parallel to the rise of the Maasina Rule movement triggered by World War II. Communities, especially on Malaita, realized that the national government was deeply wounded and in crisis. They began holding day-long village meetings to plan what to do for youth and children with regard to schooling, and for the return of migrants whose problems included alcoholism, marijuana abuse, theft, and refusal to participate in cultural practices such as village conflict resolution and traditional formal teaching sessions. Existing primary schools added two grade levels to try to handle returning secondary students, although no appropriate teaching materials were available.

Some of the returnees to Malaita who spear-headed community development in this period were national government officials who had previously done development work for the government, but now they wanted to do it for their own communities. A sense of shock began to be replaced by a sense of eagerness and transformation. After decades of struggling within the framework of national government control, villagers felt free to undertake the projects they had long wanted to pursue. An indication of the unity that this period brought was that virtually every development project taken up in village meetings in Kwara‘ae was unanimously agreed upon. For example, communities organized to raise money and negotiate provincial government approval for establishing a technical school at Kilusakwalo in 2000. They contributed the building materials and labor themselves, and succeeded in securing assistance from AusAID, Taiwan, and Japan to hire teachers and obtain teaching materials (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2013a). Several such projects were started at this time, including community-built medical clinics, designed in community meetings and shaped by villagers.

In earlier decades, parents’ disaffection with poor local schooling and their inability to have an effect on school curriculum had shown in their resistance to being involved in caring for school buildings. Now, however, villagers began to talk seriously about “taking things into our own hands,” given that they had waited and waited for the government to act, and “nothing came of it” (as many said to us in interviews). One of the major concerns was that with the back-migration of children who could not speak Kwara‘ae, or any other Malaita language, communities were seriously faced for the first time with the potential loss of their indigenous languages.

New Community Initiatives in the Post-*Tenson* Period

The fall-out from armed conflict and RAMSI occupation led to a new way of Malaitans, and Solomon Islanders generally, thinking about themselves, foreshadowed by the brief reconstruction of SI history above. The shift in their thinking was away from the belief in a modern lifestyle emulating global culture toward an appreciation of their own traditional way of life. They are integrating those aspects of global culture that they feel are positive and useful with those aspects of history and traditional culture that ground their sense of identity and provide the skills to live a rural life. Most of the new initiatives that have come in the past decade are projects that focus on what has been lost or ignored by contemporary culture, with the belief that giving up what traditionally served villagers well threatens to create problems worse than the *Tenson* (Fito‘o, 2016). Today on Malaita, the new generation of children and youth in urban and peri-urban areas speak primarily Pijin, their fluency in their indigenous language is poor or non-existent, they prefer the knowledge produced in western societies, and they believe that this will lead to the ‘good life’. Yet their parents, who also failed to learn much of their traditional culture mainly because they spent so many hours a day in English-medium classrooms that led to no employment, emphasize what has been lost. They and the elder generation (who were the young parents in our 1980s studies) realize that ‘chasing modernization’ did not bring them the Kwara‘ae experience of the ‘good life’ (*gwaumauri‘anga*). These two generations together have started new initiatives in an almost desperate effort to revive their language, culture, and identity. We mention a few of these community initiatives here (see Fito‘o, 2016).

Examples of language projects include the new Kwara‘ae and Langalanga bible translations replacing the old inaccurate missionary versions. The goal is to retrieve indigenous languages that are dying and to revive important words in these languages that have been

missing or incorrectly translated. Community members feel that these translation projects constitute the best immediate strategy for reviving indigenous languages because the bible is now part of people's lives and creates a common bond among them.

New vocational secondary schools, including Malaita Technical School at Kilusakwalo (February 2012), are being built by the Central Malaita Farmers Association, a community organization. The Technical School replaces a temporary school built at the same location in 2000, providing an opportunity for secondary school drop-outs at Form 3-6 to learn skills that will sustain them monetarily in rural areas, such as lapidary, cooking, indigenous medicine, and turning local resources into saleable commodities. Another school for dropouts is the Asia Pacific Sustainable Development (APSA) institution at Gwa'igeo school near Fiu village, started in 2001, which teaches traditional methods of raising pigs and aspects of gardening, including organic gardening. Its purpose is to help reverse the tendency of people to eat processed food, thereby improving local health. (Diabetes, cancer, heart and other chronic diet-related diseases are on the rise.) These and other schools have found financial support from NGOs and government.

In a continuation of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001) suspended during the *Tenson*, communities are organizing family, clan, and tribal meetings to teach and examine issues of land boundaries, genealogy, and traditional concepts. Such meetings involve the use of high rhetoric Kwara'ae, indigenous epistemological strategies of argumentation, and critical praxis discussed above. Related to these efforts are community power-sharing groups called 'serving clubs', including credit unions (to replace the failed outsider-introduced credit union movement of the 1980s), and communal mentorship programs of adults paired with youth to help guide them toward achieving their goals. Moreover, from

2003-2010, a group of Kuarafi tribe members from West Kwara'ae moved back up into the mountains to their traditional/customary land that had been abandoned with missionization, rebuilding their original villages and strengthening their intra-community and tribal ties.

Women are taking a larger role in community decision-making, as well. In Kwara'ae, the 'Abero Women's club in Kilusakwalo, for instance, has been awarded funding for projects focusing on healthy living, sanitation and gardening. One goal of such projects is to demonstrate that women can accomplish important development tasks and, unlike men, distribute work and rewards equally among themselves.

At the same time, a broader conversation that cuts across language lines is the political future of Malaita Province. Even as Malaitans waited two years before striking back in the ethnic conflict, keeping their plans secret while hoping that their Guadalcanal rivals would end their assaults, so today Malaitans are talking in community meetings about the future. Such conversations are being held all over the SI, of course. Malaitans are debating whether they want to secede from the SI nation, or push for a federal model to replace the current parliamentary model of government and expand their self-rule. A second preliminary draft of a constitution for a federal republic, changing provinces to states, is circulating as of this writing. Also, in 2015, Premier Peter Ramohia announced the appointment of a distinguished, educated task force to pursue Malaita Province's previously announced intention "to declare a sovereign nation of Malaita" (*Solomon Star*, 20 September 2015). A draft constitution for the Nation of Malaita was circulated and then withdrawn about a year later. SI has often been inaccurately termed a *failed state* (for a counter-argument, see Moore, 2007), when the real problem is that it is a highly corrupt state at the national level, and SI is in any case an artificial colonial construction.

Malaitans' island identity was greatly strengthened by the conflict, but its national identity was, if anything, weakened.

After a decade of community and consultant pressure from several provinces that indigenous languages be used in primary schools, the Ministry of Education issued a policy statement mandating that primary grades should be taught in children's indigenous languages rather than English (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2010). The policy provided for a late exit-maintenance model of instruction and literacy primarily in children's first language through Grade 3, staged bridging to English in Grades 4-5, and maintenance of indigenous language arts classes through Grade 9. The road to implementing this change has been slow. In 2014, the Ministry of Education started a trial program in eight schools on South Malaita, in the Sa'a language, for seven years beginning with Grade 1 (SIL International, 2015). Sa'a was selected because basic linguistic studies had been done, including an established orthography; written materials were also developed, as well as curricula. Moreover, there was strong community support for the program (Luihenu, n.d.). A locally designed program is also underway, begun in 2015 on Santa Isabel. In 2012, the national government began a staged transition to free public education, starting at the first three primary grades, and now claims that all children are receiving free primary schooling.

Conclusion: Implications of the Solomons Case for LPP

“If the federal form of government happens, or if Mala'ita has to go on its own, or even Kwara'ae is on its own, we can do it, we are ready. We feel we have what we need in this new cultural work to handle our own future.” Augustine Maelefaka,

rural villager (in a telephone call to Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo during a Malaita-wide cross-generational cultural celebration and organizational meeting in 2009).

[Translated from Kwara'ae to English by Gegeo.]

The “new cultural work” that Maelefaka refers to is development based on indigenous epistemology. In this chapter, we presented a brief case study of SI since western contact, highlighting crises and turning points that led Malaitans to turn to indigenous epistemology, bottom-up development, and schooling in both their indigenous language(s) and English (as Teteano described above). We argued that the historical crises and turning points we described shaped the current context for CCLPE on Malaita.

Education and LPP are essential activities in rural development. One implication of the Kwara'ae case is that these activities are most successful when they are grounded in a local community's indigenous language(s) and epistemology/ies through which villagers and communities can exercise their agency. This means that decision-making power relations between the central government and rural areas must at the least be shared and preferably initiated and planned at the local level. In other words, LPP for education and other strategies for development are not as successful and/or fail in many societies when they are designed top-down and imposed from the outside. We argue instead that development must “grow from within” (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2013b, p. 151). This point is not new in the theoretical literature; it began with the grassroots development movement decades ago (Escobar, 1992).

We believe that CCLPE offers the best approach to integrating local with national concerns, and that essential to community LPP in education is that researchers be engaged with communities in Davis' (2014a) sense. That is, they need to be willing to commit to long-term

field research and collaboration with communities. Researchers need to be the learners and communities the teachers in knowledge construction, with learners immersing themselves in indigenous epistemology and forms of local critical praxis. Part of researchers' learning should focus on how the communities with which they work have been shaped by historical events and turning points – points of crisis and transformation – and how that history contributed to the local process of language and culture change (in Kwara'ae, *falafala rokisi'anga*). English or another international language does have an important role to play in development. We are not arguing for isolation of rural peoples from the global world, which would in any case be impossible. However, greater effort must be made to integrate English language education with local cultural values, and to provide education in indigenous languages in meaningful ways.

Finally, SI today is a country of heightened fluidity, which in the post-colonial, globalized, contemporary world, is the norm. Moreover, SI has serious problems with government corruption, poverty, and disease. Yet we also see energy, innovation, and hope in the villages not seen for decades. Since the *Tenson* period, a new generation of youth has successfully completed higher education outside the Solomons and are now back home entering professional/governmental positions. Many Malaitans now hold graduate degrees (in law, political science, education, business, and sciences) and are determined to turn the country around.

Malaitans are also considering how to build on the institutions and values of their languages and cultures if it becomes necessary for Malaita to “go it alone”, should efforts of national reform fail. The younger generation grew up in families where their grandparents and parents told stories of blackbirding, missionization, early colonialism, WWII and Maasina Rule, and experienced the failure of rural development driven by modernization. They were exposed to

the anti-Malaita rhetoric during the *Tenson* period, some lost family members and relatives, and their villages suffered. Even many who grew up in Honiara have a renewed sense of connection to their heritage communities in rural villages and to their home islands, which are struggling with the destruction and theft of local resources through the collusion of political corruption and multinational corporations. They are aware of the urgent need for sustainable local development, and they want to restore their indigenous languages. In a few years they will replace the current generation of national leadership.

Locally on Malaita, the present situation is uncertain for villagers, but it also provides an opportunity to build a different society from the one that colonialism and neocolonialism left behind. The odds against being able to do this are great, given the power of international corporations, globalization, the invitation to greed for those in power, and dramatically changing ecological conditions, with global warming already altering the environment around which so much of indigenous knowledge is built.

It seems clear to us that CCLPE and critical community models of development built on indigenous epistemology will help shape the future, whatever path that future takes. Communities of parents and teachers working together in schools where children learn literacy in their first language during the initial years, and then continue first language instruction as English is introduced, will be essential. Many of the returning PhD and MA graduates are seeking positions at SI National University's teacher-training college, and are pressuring for traditional cultural life practices, values, and ways of thinking and debating to figure prominently in the curriculum. They are bringing back with them knowledge of contemporary theories of education, especially critical perspectives, bilingual immersion, and indigenous knowledge/epistemology. Marion Luihenu (n.d.), the national pilot coordinator for the Sa'a

bilingual project, argues that the project “is not exceptional and one day we’ll be successfully up here in the world of [multilingual mother tongue education] for all,” meaning SI as a whole.

That this has been a community-driven transformation from the beginning is an example of what Maldonado Alvarado (2010) meant by people’s achieving their own form of liberation and Tetehano’s (2015 interview) goal of schooling that prepares students for a life on their own. In this sense, SI is a case example of a “relatively creative public sphere paradigm” for LPP, emphasizing “the agency of all actors in the policy-making process” (Tollefson, 2013, p. 28).

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