Wansolwara: Sustainable Development, Education, and Regional Collaboration in Oceania

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The links between development and education have long been focal points for comparative researchers and practitioners. Over the past several decades, Indigenous scholars and communities have contributed to these conversations by pushing back on replication of dominant approaches to development and accompanying educational practices that negatively affect Indigenous lands and peoples, including more recent sustainable development initiatives. Today, key drivers of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the ideals of cooperation, collaboration, and partnership, exemplified by the Pacific Regional Education Framework 2018–2030 (PacREF). At this time, the need also arises for careful articulation of an *Oceania approach* to those ideals and, more specifically, a call for effective partnership that addresses assumptions about their enactment. In this article, I propose an Oceania-based platform, Wansolwara, as an Indigenous dialogic and relational space for regional collaboration in order to demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge systems are the foundations for decolonizing inherited regional architectures and to further education development.

Introduction

We begin with a story. In 1953, the monarch of Tonga, Her Majesty Queen Sālote Tupou III, journeyed to London to attend the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on June 2. Upon Queen Sālote's return to Tonga, she composed the song "Hāèle ki Pilitānia" to commemorate her trip (Wood-Ellem 2004, 192). In the song, she made references to London (city of lights), Paris (festive city), Geneva, and the papal blessing she received during her visit to the Vatican, and in the chorus are these words:

Fie lau sià ipu	Let me speak of a cup
Ne fonu mahuohua	Overflowing with goodness
'O tatau ai pē	The same
He laā̀ mo e ùha	In the sun and rain
Kaekehe ne takua	Depicting
À e Òtu Felenité	The Friendly Isles
Ì he langi òku nunu	In a sky studded
Ai e planité	With planets.

This chorus speaks to the heart, soul, and mind of a Tongan, and a Tongan person listening to these lyrics will understand the metaphors and imagery of what these words represent. For example, in their worldview, "goodness" refers to the interconnection between the *fonua*—the land (Tonga, the Friendly Isles)—and the people. The *fonua* is also connected to the sky and the planets, which indicates their comprehension of the Tongan universe as far more encompassing than a solely land-based definition. In the Tongan worldview, goodness is also related to a spiritual way of being that is their source of resilience, the philosophy that sustains them, come rain or shine.

I begin with this story from Oceania in order to highlight the dichotomy created when what is valued in one context is not equally valued in another context. I also begin with this story to highlight the worldview of the Tongan people, which includes ideas of themselves and the outside world. Likewise, through offering a new approach to regionalism that is carved from Oceania philosophy and ancient governance structures that are founded on (re)emerging scholarship from Oceania, this article proposes that in our quest to consider sustainable development and in a time of pandemic, new ways of being are upon us. Furthermore, as integral to studies of development, if the field of comparative and international education is to remain relevant to humanizing education through its research and practices, its stakeholders must encourage mechanisms that enable deeper engagement for our collective learning through recognition of other worldviews. This article puts Oceania in conversation with the field, across multiple contexts, and with other Indigenous peoples who are interested in transforming colonial approaches to development.

SDGs and PacREF

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the education-specific SDG 4 and the SDG 17, recognize that the key driver for achieving these goals across global contexts is the realization of ideals focused on technical cooperation, mutual collaboration, and effective partnership.[1] In recent years, there has been a drive to support "effective partnership" from various development partners and funding agencies. It appears that "collaboration across societal sectors has emerged as one of the defining concepts of international development in the 21st century. Initially in part a response to the limitations of traditional state-led, top-down development approaches, partnership has grown to become an essential paradigm in sustainable development" (Stibbe et al. 2018, 6)

In response to SDG-4, the Pacific region collectively endorsed the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) 2018–2030 in 2018. The PacREF

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[1] For more information on the SDGs, see https://sdgs.un.org; on the education-specific goal 4, see https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4; and on SDG 17, see https://sdgs.in.org.

policy document itself outlines a strong commitment to south-south collaboration, improved coordination, and effective partnership. The PacREF was endorsed by 15 Pacific countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. For decades now, these countries have demonstrated their regional willingness to coordinate efforts toward educational development, and historically 12 of these countries (excluding Palau, FSM, and PNG) have been co-owners of the regional university—the University of the South Pacific. As owners of a regional good, these nations pool their resources and enable the widening of access to tertiary education in each of their small island states.

During the decades of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) agenda, all 15 of these Pacific nations also endorsed and participated in the first regional education framework—Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) that ended in 2015 (EFA, UNESCO 2015).[2] Today, the PacREF outlines the region's vision for the next decade of educational development until 2030. Drawn by a technical working group representing the regional body of Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES), the policy areas of the PacREF and their associated strategies are theoretically designed to support the educational aspirations of the 15 Pacific country signatories . Important to note is that these countries are spread over vast distances, and to travel by sea from one end of a country to another can take months, as in the case of Kiribati, or a week in countries like Tuvalu and Tonga. The notion of physical access to education is thus far more complex when applied to PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, or the remote atoll island Pacific States such as RMI, Kiribati, Tokelau and Tuvalu. Moreover, the region as a whole, is generally clustered as Polynesia (Cook Is, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Samoa, Tonga, Niue), Micronesia (RMI, Nauru, Kiribati, Palau, FSM), and Melanesia (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and PNG). However, the region is far more diverse than these clusters, as exemplified by the presence of languages—for example, in Solomon Islands alone, there are about 70 languages spoken, with 138 in Vanuatu, and 850 in PNG, making it the most linguistically diverse area in the world. The countries also range in population from just over 1,600 in Niue to 8.9 million in PNG (SPC 2020).

All of these countries have inherited colonial legacies from Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, New Zealand, or the United States of America. Some countries like RMI and Vanuatu have endured a series of different colonial administrations. With regards to educational development,

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[2] Other Pacific countries have not joined the PacREF, including French Polynesia and New Caledonia. In addition to this group are Forum observer countries and territories, including American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Guam, Timor Leste, and Wallis and Futuna.

remnants of the colonial past remain present in each country's educational system—from the anglophone and francophone dual-language instruction system of Vanuatu to the strong influence of US education in the RMI and other former US territories. This historical context is notable when considering the various influences that have shaped governance and education across this region, which makes the implementation of the PacREF a significant project with decolonizing potential.

To implement the PacREF, there are five agencies involved,[3] and funding comes from the Aotearoa/New Zealand government and the Global Partnership for Education, which have given support for the first phase of the development program. To facilitate that funding, the Asian Development Bank has been chosen by the countries as the granting agent and directly contracts the implementing agencies to deliver the PacREF plan. The PacREF is further governed by a steering committee made up of representatives from the countries and reports to the Pacific Heads of Education Systems and through to the Forum Education Ministers Meeting. Alongside this structure is the Council of Regional Organisations for the Pacific, which includes the heads of the regional implementing agencies. These regional structures have come to define the regional architecture and what is considered educational development for the region.

Most notable for the purposes of this article, is that in the PacREF Implementation Plan, there is a strong call for two important processes—South-South cooperation and collaboration for strengthened regionalism. At the same time, this call is accompanied by a number of assumptions about the *why, how,* and *what* questions of any processes and structures for deepening what is meant by the terms "cooperation," "collaboration," and "strengthened regionalism."

Considering a New Oceania Platform for Collaboration

The PacREF is situated within a highly complex and dynamic sociopolitical and economic context and is a platform where global agenda meets national interest and where regional organizations (with the best of intentions) try to mediate and protect various education agendas. This dynamic space is what Bray and Manzon describe as a "complex interplay between macro- and meso-structural conditions and micro-political interests on the part of its [CIE] practitioners" (2014, 5). In the PacREF platform are also competing worldviews about what is meant by "development" and "education" and what is understood about Pacific people. These complex and dynamic networks and processes, whether intentional or not, have come to define and

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[3] University of the South Pacific, Secretariat for Pacific Community's Educational Quality and Assessment Program, the Australia Pacific Technical Coalition, UNESCO and UNICEF.

govern the practices of education and development (McCormick 2017). It is within these structures that regional collaboration is shaped and that I describe in the following sections.

Blue Pacific Regionalism

The PacREF as a regional education policy is situated between two significant initiatives—the 2014 Framework for Pacific Regionalism and Blue Pacific Regionalism,[4] which has been evolving over at least the past 15 years, starting with the Pacific Plan of 2005. Critical to note is that Blue Pacific framework is an identity-based collaboration linked with strategies whose goals center the collective potential of our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean, explicit recognition of our shared ocean identity, ocean geography, and ocean resources and put the Blue Pacific at the center of policy making and collective action for advancing the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Vision for our region (Taylor 2017).

Over the past decade of collaboration building and proposing strategies, there have been some important shifts, the most obvious of which is the desire for regional inclusivity and control. For example, the 2005 Pacific Plan was heavily criticized due to its lack of relevance to Pacific people's lives and well-being,[5] whereas the 2014 Framework for Pacific Regionalism is people-focused and calls for Pacific people to control regional agendas and to engage at regional and at global levels to ensure that regionalism is about improving the lives of Pacific people.

However, the biggest driver of the need for collaboration in the Pacific has been the impact of climate change. When the Pacific region first sounded the early warnings about the impact of climate change, there was very little response from the international community—least of all from Australia and New Zealand, who are members of this regional architecture. Today, several regional agencies established without New Zealand and Australia—Pacific Development Islands Forum, Small Islands Development States, Melanesian Spearhead Group, Polynesian Leaders Forum, Micronesian Leaders Forum, and the Parties to the Nauru Agreement—have demonstrated alternatives to the old regional order that was top-down and less interested in collaboration and local representation. These newer regional agencies are part of the resistance against the continuing hegemony of former colonial powers that are now development partners in influencing the sovereignty of Pacific nations (Aqorau 2016; Tarte 2016; Tavola 2016).

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[4] The Pacific Blue regionalism has evolved over time, from the Pacific Plan initially set up in 2005 to the Framework for Pacific Regionalism 2014. At present, the Pacific Forum Secretariat is conducting region wide consultation for the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy. For more information, see https://www.forumsec.org/pacific-regionalism/.

[5] Huffer (2006a, 2006b); Fox (2011); Tarte (2014); Fry (2015b).

Beneath the Blue Pacific—the Currents

The structural changes in the regional architecture and the emergence of the Blue Pacific narrative are part of a growing Oceania school of thought that has been challenging the persistent residues of Pacific colonial legacy (Fox 2014). Perhaps the most definitive reclaiming of our region from an international development perspective is by Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa, who shifted the popular description of how we were seen from "Islands in the Sea" to a "Sea of Islands" (1993). He said, "There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as 'islands in a far sea' and as 'a sea of islands.' The first emphasizes dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from centres of power. Focusing in this way stresses the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in totality of their relationships" (152–53). Hau'ofa's Oceania philosophy emerged during the 1990s "heterogeneity" phase of the evolution of the comparative and international education (CIE) field, a time described as marked by "proliferation of the number and variety of paradigms making up the field" (Wolhuter 2016, 22). Linked with postmodernism, there was increasing awareness of different paradigms and knowledge systems, the existence of which countered the idea of a singular paradigm or metanarrative (Wolhuter 2016). In this era, Indigenous epistemologies from around the world also gained prominence in the literature and, more specifically for the Pacific, created openings for discussions about decolonial thinking,[6] Indigenous knowledge systems and research methods (Fairbairn-Dunlop and Coxon 2014; Thaman 1997; Sanga and Reynolds 2018), and the role of aid in educational development (Sanga 2016; Coxon and Munce 2008).

Some of the primary advocates for decolonial thinking and Indigenous knowledge systems in Pacific education have followed Hau'ofa in his critique of a neocolonial regional order and education systems that, despite the presence of aid and promised development, still fall short of enriching the lives of Pacific people (Fox 2016). Perhaps most obvious, but often unspoken, is that formal education in and of itself was an introduced phenomenon to the Pacific and the starting point for international education (Kidman 2018). Externally conceptualized schooling was brought by missionaries as a way to "civilize" Pacific people. The Christianization of the Pacific was iteratively driven by an education system that, from a comparative education perspective, meets the philanthropic ideal of "serving and improving the state of humanity" (Wolhuter 2014, 32–35). This philanthropic feature of CIE remains strongly evident in the actions and development work of international organizations that continue to operate from a modernization theory standpoint—that is, that Pacific peoples still need to improve according to Western standards.

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[6] Taufe'ulungaki (1988); Thaman (1988); Tuhiwai Smith (1999); Nabobo-Baba (2009).

Over time, this imported education system also evolved stratified systems of education and social structure that led to cultural dissonance between the educated elite and their local communities, which is typical of a metropole-colony relationship (McLaughlin 2017). Furthermore, over 30 years ago, Hau'ofa (1993) recognized disconnection between the world of government bureaucracy, regional technical advisers, development partners, and local communities, which is the default for approaches to educational development in the regional space. Although with good intentions, the overall mission remains to transform traditional societies into modern ones through education that is borrowed, usually from the Global North. In doing so, external partners, through aid and technical assistance necessarily influence regional development, governance, and education in the Pacific through their models of institutions, their rules, and their policy problems and choices (McCormick 2017).

In a first-of-its-kind study, Wood et al. (2020) address the problems of aid project effectiveness in the Pacific by using causal mediation analysis of aid effectiveness at the project level. Utilizing statistical analysis of project level performance, they find that the "remoteness and small populations of many Pacific countries appear to be the main constraint on aid effectiveness in the region" and identified that "on average, the countries of the Pacific are better governed and freer than the rest of the developing world (at least as captured in standard measures)," which they conclude is linked with diminished effectiveness of aid (2020, 13). Moreover, Wood and colleagues propose that the variable of freedom is an indicator of something deeper, which they refer to as "the patronage-oriented nature of politics in many Pacific democracies" to which donors might adapt through "working in a manner appropriate to giving aid in difficult circumstances," avoiding geostrategic competition, and investing in contextual expertise (20–21).

There is evidence of growing momentum among Pacific scholars forging stronger collaborations across this diverse region. For example, Māori scholar Joanna Kidman advocates that "one of the greatest acts of resistance in the neoliberal settler-colonial university happens when indigenous scholars act decisively to care for each other, as scholars" (2018, 6). Further to this, McLaughlin (2017) advocates for partnerships that are based on acts of caring for one another. Such partnerships are to consider Pacific and Indigenous cultural values of respect, reciprocity, mutual benefit, and empowerment. There are also models of caring in action: Kabini Sanga (2011) describes the influential "Re-thinking Pacific Education for Pacific People" (RPEIPP) movement as an example of symbiotic and generative partnerships. These partnerships are among multiple relationships that co-exist within a volatile and dynamic Pacific development context. A context where regional service delivery is based on recognition of responsiveness to spaces for being together (regional) and apart (national) (Sanga 2011, 8–9). Relatedly, McCormick

and Johansson-Fua (2019) describe the journey of two education societies in the region and the relational ties created to bridge Indigenous Pacific based scholars of the Vaka Pacific, born out of the RPEIPP movement and Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand- based scholars of the recently renamed Oceania Comparative and International Education Society.[7] These are all efforts across the region to strengthen relationships and collaboration among Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenous scholars who call the Pacific their home.

The Caribbean region faces challenges similar to those in the Pacific and among other small island states, including climate change, remoteness, economies of scale, and navigating a global agenda and national realities. Work by Louisy (2001) argues for a broader view of globalization that takes into account the diversity of human experience and calls for deeper understanding of different contexts. Louisy presents a Caribbean contribution to a new perspective of globalization by questioning of "whose knowledge" we use and "for whose benefit." Louisy's questions have been echoed by Pacific scholars (Taufe'ulungaki 2014) as a challenge to the role of comparative and international research for small island states and for Indigenous communities.

From an international perspective, the argument for appreciating context in the development discourse has been made by researchers (Crossley and Jarvis 2001) from the Global North for decades. Cowen (2006), among others, has argued for the importance of context in the field of comparative and international education. Crossley (1999, 2008a, 2009a) and Bray (2011) have also drawn attention to the cultural and historical dimensions of the comparative and international education field, focusing in particular on small island states. In drawing our attention to the context (cultural and historical) and, in this instance, to small island states, we recognize that there are other ways of knowing (Masemann 1990) and knowledge creation. Masemann's argument for "ways of knowing" in the field of CIE demonstrated the diversity and range of approaches to research and notions of epistemic justice.

In more recent years, initial concern for other "ways of knowing" has taken greater attention with research positioning and epistemic justice. This has included work by Crossley and colleagues (2016), who requestion the nature of insider/outsider positioning—issues that also challenges ways of collaborating and co-construction with others. Along similar lines is the work by Ermine (Ermine 2007) on ethical spaces for engagement, in which he argues that the "new partnership model of ethical space, in a cooperative spirit between Indigenous peoples and western institutions, will create new currents of thought that flow in different direction and overrun the old ways

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[7] For more information, see https://ocies.org.

of thinking" (203). This concern with the collaborative and research spaces between Global North and Global South, as well as between Indigenous researchers and others, is also linked to critiques of uncritical education policy and research methodology transfer (Steiner-Khamsi and Waldow 2012; Johansson-Fua 2016; Crossley 2019)

In 2020, the world witnessed several protests around world, including the Black Lives Matter movement and other Indigenous and anticolonial movements. These events speak to deeply rooted social structures, including education, that still have yet to fully appreciate diverse knowledge systems. Crossley (2021) highlights the epistemological and methodological issues within CIE. He further argues for more robust work to apply decolonial analysis and deeper critical reflexivity to understanding context.

However, the broader field of CIE and practices related to and resulting from its research requires interrogation, and this has concerned Indigenous scholars for a long time. In a recent survey, Wiseman and Wolhuter (2019) describe the state of CIE as comprising an infinite number of "combinations of factors, whether scholarly or professional, and there is no one group, approach, or canon of literature that defines it. And, there lies the problem" (2). They highlight three key "lacks"—of participation among local stakeholders in decision making, of communication between individual and organizations studying education comparatively or internationally, and of practice-oriented research (3–4). They also identify solutions, including collaboration on meaningful research where CIE scholars and development professionals actually listen to the people on the ground (4–5). This research and other studies like it demonstrate that listening, local control, and real structural changes are still challenges for CIE.

Wansolwara: A New Platform for Regional Collaboration

Thus far in this article, I have provided contextual information regarding the Pacific region, its colonial educational legacies, and the ways in which development agendas with aid from elsewhere have historically shaped projects in the region. I have also outlined local resistances and the work of scholars across the Pacific and Oceania that has begun to offer understandings of what is meant by collaboration. In this section I offer Wansolwara as a platform for regional collaboration as an attempt to think decolonially and to offer CIE insight into what the field and its practitioners miss when they do not recognize the validity and rigor of Indigenous knowledge and values. This platform also offers processes and structures that can enable CIE scholars and development professionals to hear us.

Wansolwara means "one salt water" in the Solomon Islands pidgin language, and as a metaphor, refers to oneness—one people, one ocean, and one talk—a kind of spirit and a way of relating to a common clan. The term

wansolwara has long been used by students at the University of South Pacific to describe their newspaper, reflecting their vision of a unified group of young Pacific people. A metaphor is deliberately used here, as it concurs with our Pacific worldview and our use of language as "powerful devices for shaping our perceptions and lived experiences" (Owen 2001, xv). The use of a metaphor is also deliberate in that it seeks consensus from a diverse region—as one can interpret the metaphor from their social-cultural context and make sense of the metaphor from their perspective. The spirit of Wansolwara refers to a recognition of togetherness, drawn from a common shared ocean to creating harmony, to be connected to the present, the future, and the past of our ancestors. I purposely use a Solomon Islands pidgin language to describe what others may refer to as Oceania and the Polynesian term *moana* (deep ocean). While *moana* is a proto-Polynesian term found throughout most of Polynesia, *wansolwara* is a pidgin term constructed by Solomon Islanders and other Melanesians as they navigated their world during colonial times. Today, Solomon Islands Pidgin, Vanuatu Bislama, and Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin are part of the everyday language, and more importantly, pidgin connects these linguistically diverse Melanesian cultures with each other and the outside world.

Moreover, the creation of Melanesian pidgin speaks to a spirit of resilience (of Indigenous mother tongues), innovation (creating new languages from many diverse languages), and connectedness (relating across different contexts). The term *wansolwara* as a pidgin term therefore speaks to collaboration while reflecting this spirit. Choosing to conceptualize a process for collaboration and naming it Wansolwara is a deliberate act to decolonize and de-link (from the Global North), constituting epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2009). More profoundly, from the point of conceptualization, Wansolwara begins from *our ocean identity.* From an ocean identity and perspective, a redefinition of collaboration, and relatedly development, is shaped by connectedness and deep historical relationships.

The initial reference point for Wansolwara as a platform for collaboration comes from the work I referred to earlier in this article on Hau'ofa's reconceptualization of "Sea of Islands" and the new regional narrative of the Blue Pacific Continent identity. Collectively, "Sea of Islands," "Blue Pacific Continent," and "Wansolwara" underscore and strengthen a desire to decolonize and reconstruct a new regional identity. In theory, Wansolwara is a dialogic and relational space within which to encourage genuine cooperation and collaboration not only among member countries but also with development partners and the implementing agencies of the PacREF. It is important to stress that Wansolwara is also pragmatic and drawn from collective local ontologies that guide individual and organizational collaborations on meaningful research and practical solutions for Pacific people and redefine the rules of engagement and the processes and the structure of regional collaboration. Epistemically, Wansolwara represents an act of reclaiming ownership

of the structures and processes for collaboration, whereby the act of re-claiming enables recreating newer structures and processes for collaboration that reflect a dynamic regional identity. In terms of development agendas, Wansolwara speaks back to the CIE that the Pacific context is not a void of silent spaces.

A Dialogic Space

The Wansolwara platform is, first, a dialogic space. In a region as diverse as the Pacific, there are multiple ways that cultures communicate, share, investigate, make sense, and negotiate everyday lives. At present the literature on Pacific-based dialogue is characterized by the Polynesian Talanoa ('Otunuku 2011; Faàvae et al. 2016; Vaioleti 2016) and Melanesian Tok Stori (Sanga and Reynolds 2018).[8] There are also other examples of everyday dialogic relationships in the Pacific in the oral literature, including the Marshallese Bwebwenato (Jim et al. 2021), but I focus on Talanoa here.

Most recently, Veikune et al. (2020) describe Talanoa as part of a cumulative knowledge creation process that is interactive and dynamic and builds on the contributions of others in multiple spaces, where the "dialogic principles [of] reciprocal, supportive and collective have a synergy with the values-based practices of Talanoa" and where "talk becomes both what to do and how it is done" (110).

The dialogic space, however, is also a space for silence that involves deep reflection, making sense, and listening. Thus, the other side of Talanoa is *fānongo*—deep listening (Taufe'ulungaki et al. 2007). The process of *fānongo* is an essential part of Talanoa that enables the process to be cumulative, supportive, reciprocal, and reaching *talanoa mālie*, meaning "a new level of understanding" (Johansson-Fua 2014). As a dialogical space that draws from Pacific-based dialogue, Wansolwara is therefore also a space for silence, and this is one of the most misinterpreted features of Pacific communication and culture. In Pacific cultures, and more specifically for Polynesian cultures, silence is a very strong message that means anything but consent. Silence often means discontent, disagreement, disengagement, frustration, and anger. Pacific silence (and, consequently, understanding our Pacific voice) involves a far more complex set of social cultural dynamics that is misunderstood or ignored. This Pacific culture of silence, however, becomes problematic when

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[8] In more recent years there has been steady growth in the literature on Tok Stori as another Pacific dialogic process. Sanga and Reynolds (2018) look at similarities between Tok Stori and Talanoa as Pacific-based dialogic processes. They argued that through an ontological lens, Tok Stori and Talanoa understand the world as dialogic, relational, and processual and that both approaches are group-based oral negotiations aimed at increased understanding promoted by relational development" (13). However, despite their similarities, each term is used within relevant contexts. Just as Tongans may regard Tok Stori as borrowed, Melanesians may also find Talanoa as something to learn.

it is forced to operate in organizational contexts that are structurally build on modernization theory underpinned with extractive and competitive values.

A Relational Space

The Wansolwara is, second, a relational space. A defining feature of Pacific cultures is the value placed on relationships. When a Tongan child is born, the child is by custom named by their father's sister (the sacred aunt), and the child is often named after an ancestor. The child's identity is forged from and by the collective, both by the ancestors as well as by the present guardians. From a Tongan perspective, *vā* refers to relationship, and Thaman (2008) emphasizes the "importance of vā as the basis for Tongan social interaction" that "is reflected in the high regard people place on rules governing different kinds of interpersonal relationships and social interaction" (464). Of these relationships, it is important for Tongans to maintain harmony and peace and as such, *being relational* requires knowledge of the social context and the existing networks between individuals and groups.

These are ethical systems defined from the collective and our maintenance of relationships—*fakaàpaàpa* (respect), *loto tō* (humility), *mamahiì meà* (loyalty), and *fēveitokaiàki* (reciprocity). Additionally, as our ethical system defines our relationship to one another, it also defines our relationship with nature—the land, the ocean, the sky, and the supernatural. So, when Hau'ofa (1993) states that "we are the ocean," and that the "ocean is in us," these words speak to our values and worldview that are based on relationships with one another and our environment. This same connectedness was expressed in Queen Sālote Tupou III's song with which I opened this article.

As people who live in an island context close to nature and the ocean, reciprocity is a core value for us (Hau'ofa 1993). Being in a reciprocal culture encourages collaboration and sharing of resources that promote mutual benefit. A relational approach supports the existence of *kainga*, or kinship, as members of the same clan who are connected through shared history, geography, and time. The Tongan sociological grouping of *kainga* (large alliances of clans who are connected through kinship) connects Tongans across the diaspora to the homeland. Some of these *kainga* are still connected through ancient ties to Fijians, Samoans, Niueans, and other neighboring countries that share genealogical linkages with Tongans. The relational ties that exist within the *kainga* are maintained through trade and cultural exchanges, and the remittance economy that exists between the diaspora and the homeland depends on these relational ties. Thus, the world of Pacific people is interconnected through *kainga* system and other similar sociological systems that are often overlooked, especially where they could be most striking, such as in education and development.

Over the years, though, there has been growing appreciation of context, and recognition that aid and intervention designs take place within context

(Cowen 2006; Coxon and Munce 2008; Crossley 2010). As Sanga (2016) argues, it is not the forms of aid that matters, but rather the encounter, the relational spaces, created through aid. Likewise, Spratt (2020) calls for adopting a relational lens to development aid and that by adopting a relational lens, "it is the relational processes that are involved in the "businesses of aid that lead to change, not the entity of aid itself" (159). Spratt further argues that relationality demands aid agencies and their actors to recognize themselves as part of the context and not separate from it, which means that so-called experts are necessarily learning and changing through the work (160). However, efforts to work through a relational lens are not easy when the very structures that deliver aid and the associated machinery are focused on ensuring standardization of approaches and expected outcomes.

Here I agree with Spratt, who points out that valuing relationality is more than an epistemological exercise. Relationality is also about thinking critically about the fundamental ethical values that underpin engagement across contexts (2020, 163). In the Wansolwara platform, relational space is encouraged through fostering a kinship and kainga system of relating to one another based on the core value of reciprocity. A relational space is encouraged to open opportunities for epistemological rediscovery and creating new understandings of a context and of education for development. Ultimately, Wansolwara cannot remain just an idea or a framework; it must also be actionable and practical.

Discussion: *Fono*—Resurfacing Ancient Structures

Throughout the Pacific, there are hundreds of ancient, time-tested governance structures that even today remain a core part of traditional and modern governance structures. To further secure into practice Wansolwara,[9] I suggest the pan-Polynesian traditional governance structure of the *fono*. The *fono* in Tonga is a gathering of the community to make announcements and to discuss and reach decisions for the collective. At a *fono* anyone can present their views and arguments (although there is a protocol or ranking order for who speaks and when). The *fono* is also a commitment and a customary law that is agreed to by the community. In more recent times, *fono* has been used for public consultations. The *fono* is generally guided by values of respect, humility, and reciprocity, and Talanoa is the medium of communication.

One of the unique features of a *fono* is the level of collaboration created in the space. No one really knows or can predetermine the outcome of a *fono*, as the outcome is determined during the *fono* by the people present, the flow of the Talanoa, the negotiations, the timing of the *fono*, and the space where

[9] Wansolwara as a framework for regional collaboration was accepted by the PacREF Steering Committee and subsequently by the Council of Regional Organisations for the Pacific Human Resource Development Working Group in June 2020 as a concept to be explored in the implementation of the PacREF.

the *fono* is being held. A *fono*, like the Talanoa that it employs, is not tied to time, and the level of collaboration determines how long a *fono* may take. If the level of collaboration and negotiation is superficial, it can be very short. If the Talanoa is interesting, the level of collaboration deep and the negotiations complex, the *fono* will take a while.

In a *fono*, the seating arrangement is usually circular so that every member can see the others. Being able to see who is speaking is so important to a Tongan and relates to how to structure their response and their contribution to the Talanoa. Seeing who is present helps to define one's positionality in that particular context and therefore define the basis of one's contribution. Part of the dialogue during the *fono*, is the deep listening—*fānongo*—which is to also sense, to feel, and to listen to the spoken as well as the unspoken words. The language used in a *fono* is complex—it can be figurative; allegorical; full of imageries, symbols, and references to historical and mythical events—and without deep knowledge and understanding of that language context, most of the *fono* deliberations will be lost to the foreigner. So, while the *fono* can be inclusive, it is simultaneously exclusive based on those who understand the language of the context.

Fono is also deeply connected to our sense of accountability and transparency to the collective, and the *fono* has its own internal mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the outcome. Those mechanisms are part of the Talanoa process and relationship to those in the *fono*. People know when they come out of a *fono*, whether it was worthwhile or not. Throughout the Pacific, there are other traditional governance structures like the *fono*, as in the *maneaba* in Kiribati and the *falekaupule* in Tuvalu. These ancient governance structures are underpinned by their own values, protocols and rules of engagement. As mentioned previously, the old order of regionalism has been defined on a knowledge base and structures of reference created outside of the region by former colonial administrations. If we are to articulate a new form of regionalism, perhaps a starting point maybe from our *fono*, our *maneaba*, our *falekaupule*, and many other Oceania-based governance structures. Only then can we begin to devise a new order that is authentic and deeply connected to our history, our geography, our epistemology, and our way of life. If the new regional order can be more like the *fono* and less about councils, boards, and other externally imposed governance systems, how might we then relate to one another, and what might we build together?

Conclusion: A Garland from Oceania

In this article, I have proposed an Oceania-based platform, Wansolwara, as an Indigenous dialogic and relational space for regional collaboration. The intention of this article is to demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge systems are the foundations for decolonizing inherited regional architectures and furthering education development.

From a global perspective, the CIE has drawn attention to understanding cultural context. CIE has also gone further to draw attention to the epistemological and methodological issues around frameworks for research in the field. Scholars from the Global North and from the Global South have worked toward decolonizing education and supporting Indigenous voices. I agree with Crossley (2021) that we need to apply decolonial analysis and deeper critical reflexivity and to do more to understand the differences within and across contexts and avoid dualistic tendencies. I have argued elsewhere (Johansson-Fua 2016) for the need to let the context speak for itself, and less about others describing the context. When Indigenous voices speak, they speak to the differences, to the "other" knowledge system that completes an inclusive and whole planet knowledge system. Unfortunately, those conversations about our "differences" become "uncomfortable" too quickly for others and are soon dismissed. However, it is no longer sufficient to just talk about giving voice to Indigenous research—just as it is no longer beneficial to keep promoting Indigenous voices so loudly that you drown out the same voices in the process. Similarly, Indigenous scholars must also take responsibility to demonstrate with care when sharing our knowledge systems. However, Indigenous scholars can dig deeper into critical reflexivity only when we ourselves have stopped being angry and stopped being a victim. The act of decolonial thinking is also an act of reclaiming and reaffirming our values and identity. Decolonial thinking should be a process toward contentment and peace, rather than toward anger and disillusion.

The Wansolwara Oceania-based platform for collaboration is an attempt to demonstrate that within the context of Oceania there are existing knowledge systems that can inform a new approach to collaboration. The Wansolwara platform for collaboration builds on Epeli Hau'ofa's "Sea of Islands" and a deep desire for these small island states to be together—a regional clan. This article has attempted to show the values, social processes, and structures that can underpin such a regional platform for collaboration. It is an attempt to define and build from within an approach to regional collaboration and thereby demonstrate what decolonial thinking may look like.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the existential impact of climate change on small island states of the Pacific have highlighted not only our vulnerabilities but also, more importantly, the need for regional solidarity. Wansolwara is a platform that we collectively own and that encourages us to be who we are. The field of CIE has the potential to encourage a deeper level of reflexivity and can also encourage Indigenous voices to demonstrate how decolonial thinking can change old structures and foreign systems.

In their 2021 meeting, the Pacific education ministers endorsed the PacREF Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that includes the Wansolwara governance structure including recognition of the PacREF's Implementing Agency's *fono*.[10]

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[10] See www.pacref.org.

In the same meeting, the Pacific education ministers also approved the PacREF Research Framework and encouraged member countries to honor Pacific ethics and research methodologies in their education research work.

I conclude with a poem from a Tongan scholar poet Konai Helu Thaman (1993,11):

> We left for many places
> We entered eyes still closed
> Yet we could feel the fragrance
> A power touching those
> Who craved instead to ride the waves
> Towards the blowholes not the shore
> Then prayed to *maui* for his *mana*
> To mend their broken oar.

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