



CLIMATE CHANGE IN PASIFIKA RELATIONAL ITULAGI

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Introduction

The biggest threat to the climate discourse today is not so much the belief that it is still possible to reimagine the current climate trajectory, but rather the unimaginable arrogance to believe that an alternative trajectory is possible. Today, we fear to move away from the comfortability of the current path. Those who are responsible for climate strategies and policies mostly lack one thing. That is, they are not trained with the deep knowledge on how to deal with the complexities of communities and the multidimensional nature of their structures and issues. This fear relates to the fact that most of the trainings on climate change and many social and ecological issues were conducted under the umbrella of one-dimensional scientific approaches of Western philosophical traditions. This has contributed to the inability of many policy makers to see the climate issue from a relational *itulagi*,^[1] grounded in Pasifika philosophies, ethics, and spiritualities. For a long time, we have buried the tools that make us resilient, succumbing to the shadows of a one-sided story that focuses entirely on the secular dimension with the spiritual lost beneath a one-dimensional umbra. Like the women of Likiepo, Rongelap in Micronesia “who are out at night to bury their...stillborn babies” we too are “out at night...burying our most sacred texts, our indigeneity and spirituality” the very things that make us who we are (Aguon 2008, 136; see also Casimira 2024, 2).

This chapter argues for an ‘unburial’ of this neglected dimension which not only holds the key to constructive and sustainable solutions to the climate crisis, it also holds the key to a so-called ‘corrective balance’ of the whole human and ecological system, a kind of balance that activates self-healing and regenerative growth. One that is not managed by humans, but rather by the cosmic order itself. If we are serious about practical solutions to the climate crisis, solutions that reflect this corrective balance, we need a narrative grounded in and driven by the philosophies, ethics, and spiritualities of the Pasifika household.^[2] The chapter will offer an alternative way of approaching the climate crisis from a Pasifika relational *itulagi*. It offers the story of Pasifika communities as they understand the climate crisis through the lens of their own ways of knowing and being and why such is critical to reforming climate policies and strategies. It will provide some examples of how communities deal with issues and crises at the communities-based level from an ethical and relational *itulagi*, and also highlights why spirituality has to be the key to the climate discourse. When we miss spirituality, we miss understanding in depth the integrated multidimensional structure of communities, which could consequently lead to a misrepresentation of the Pasifika household in climate discourse.

^{1]} *Itulagi* (a combination of two words: *itu* means ‘side’ and *lagi* means ‘horizon’ or ‘heavens’) is a Samoan word meaning ‘side of the horizon’ or ‘side of the heavens.’ My preference to use ‘*itulagi*’ rather than ‘worldview’ is deliberate. I have always found the idea of worldview problematic. The term *itulagi* reinforces our contextual positioning, which is always partial and context-based. The term connotes humility, reassuring us that every perspective must be declared limited. *Itulagi* never claims to be the whole. It also acknowledges that one’s liberative *itulagi* could be someone else’s oppressive story. The term reinforces the fact that while policy makers were trained in Western knowledge system, it is critically important that they are also properly trained in the *itulagi* of the Pasifika household.

^[2] In 2017, Pasifika churches resolved to use the framework of the ‘Pasifika household’ as its new ecumenical and mission strategy not only to capture the common struggle of the household under (neo)colonial threats, including the threat of climate change and many other ecological crises, but also reflecting the shift of focus from the idea of being “peaceful” as connoted in the colonial term Pacific to that of resilience and the self-determination of household. It also means that Pasifika churches no longer endorse the colonial subdivisions of Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, as the Pasifika household is one extended family.

The polycrisis

The general consensus of both regional and international climate forums is that climate change is the “single greatest threat to the livelihood, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific” (Pacific Island Forum 2019, 4). However, this statement needs to be revisited due to a shift in the climate change discourse. Many international forums, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Economic Forum (WEF), and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), have come to acknowledge that the increasingly pressing global multifaceted and interconnected issues are all somehow connected to climate change as its centre. These organisations refer to the polycrisis, the entanglement and overlapping of many crises that influence and exacerbate each other. Scientists and academics call the era in which this polycrisis emerged the Anthropocene, a geological epoch characterised by humans’ substantial impact on the planet, mainly negative. Social liberationist movements call it the Capitocene, a geohistorical epoch characterised by a system of power, profit, and production that destroys the ‘whole of life.’

Whatever name or label we ascribe to it, what is clear is that the climate change issue is less and less a ‘single greatest threat.’ Rather it is more a ‘global multifaceted threat’ with multiple convergences with all other issues. With the neocolonial extractivism becoming ever more apparent, the species extinction, the accelerated colonial expansionary agenda through wars and policies, the interplay of growth, power, and violence: these are all pointing to the fact that the money-centred development “is increasingly coming up against planetary boundaries” (Froese et al. 2024, 4) and that a crisis can no longer be treated as a stand-alone event. In the Pasifika household, the introduction of the Blue Pacific narrative[3] aimed to promote the idea that regional cohesion is stronger when there is “shared stewardship”, and securing a future can only be credible when we have collective responsibility. The concept of the Blue Pacific “represents our recognition that as a region, we are large, connected and strategically important”; it “speaks to the collective potential of our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean” (Malielegaoi 2018). This regional cohesion was firmed up more through the adoption of several policies such as the *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific* (FRDP) which replaced the two regional frameworks, the *Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change* (PIFACC) and the *Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action* (RFA), to guide island countries’ climate strategies. Resilience and regional cooperation are some of the key themes in this new found collective vision.

Whatever name or label we ascribe to it, what is clear is that the climate change issue is less and less a ‘single greatest threat.’

Today, the region has regained international visibility through geopolitical competition. This not only resuscitated the colonial ‘Pacific rush’ with renewed profiling of strategic importance, but also has increased its political and economic leverage, even as “diplomatic price setters”, to maximise benefits including multiple opportunities to steer and control the climate change narrative, something that has never existed before (see Sora et al. 2024, 5). With Western countries offering more aid, more loans, more technological promises, and more defence and security cooperation simply to counterbalance China’s influence in the region, this has presented new opportunities and power to rethink partnerships.

However, since this newfound power was developed, gaps have slowly appeared that are already redefining the Pasifika household. Gaps such as leadership and governance deficiencies, as reflected in the withdrawal of the Micronesia states due to the southern states’ failure to honour a sub-regional rotational model for Forum leadership; the collapse of the notion of an interconnected Pasifika due to different positions on deep-sea mining; the divided opinion over the controversial colonisation of some island countries, such as the case of Indonesia taking over West Papua.

[3] The Blue Pacific is a strategic narrative adopted by Pacific islands forum countries in 2017 for Pasifika to maintain its strategic autonomy, its regional security, its interconnected identity apart from the political and economic framing by powerful countries, to increase cooperation and collective action, and to enhance the sense of responsibility as custodians of the largest ocean in the world.

These challenges are in addition to the unresolved climate issues already impacting the region. These include the language crisis faced by communities who struggle to understand the high-level international climate language of “international climate experts” who are consultants sent in by governments and international donors to review or implement climate strategies. The conceptual vagueness and secularity of these strategies not only perpetuates the ‘local community knows little’ attitude of many donors, but also creates a gateway for foreign consultants to impose their own cultural perceptions on communities. This leads to the continuous displacement of local cultures and knowledge. What used to be the commonsense climate knowledge of local communities suddenly doesn’t appear to make any sense. And what was normally deemed as collective and communities-based climate knowledge all of a sudden takes a back seat to give space to the so-called ‘expert knowledge.’

But perhaps the most notable of the gaps is that the many national and regional climate policies and strategies struggle to grow roots and be effective in complex and multidimensional contexts due to the failure to incorporate Pasifika philosophies, ethics, and spiritualities. The more we see this, the more it becomes clear that the climate discourse expands its power and extends its scope to reinforce both old and new colonial entanglements. What needs to be realised is that once spirituality is removed from the picture, we are strategically making communities’ systems vulnerable and weak. Systems that have been created and built by communities on more holistic foundations and tested for centuries to withstand natural hazards and climate disasters. This is a necessary foundation for addressing new questions for climate change including new advanced research and new climate approaches and solutions.

On being relational

Relationality is one of the most contested and abused concepts in the history of the study of the strands of philosophy called ‘ontology’ (our ways of being) and ‘epistemology’ (our ways of knowing). Perhaps the most notable is the unceasing attention given by these two strands to the relationship between human beings, in particular the notion of self vs relations at the expense of all other relationships. Due to the human-centredness of the Western philosophical tradition, it has struggled for centuries to articulate clearly how to conceptualise an integrated and harmonious relationship between the individual and community, one and the many, being and relation.

Relationality as used in this chapter is critical in guiding us on how to deal with the notion of corrective balance, in particular understanding the idea of contradictions within complex structures including multifaceted issues beyond a mere anthropocentric focus and linear progression. The following is how relationality is used in this chapter, and also in this publication.

- Relationality is a ‘living principle.’ A relational consciousness sees that relationality is first and foremost a living principle. Relationality can only be understood through the context of living relationships. It is not an abstract notion that can be fully encapsulated through academia’s theorisation. Rather it is a living phenomenon constantly tested, verified, and renewed through living with communities and in particular during the time of crises.
- Relationality is a principle of ‘integration.’ A relational consciousness sees life as always integrated, and therefore everything is connected to everything. Because the human being, land, sea, and sky, are interrelated and part of the kinship network, therefore all issues emerging from these are also interrelated. Relationality means that everything is distinct and different yet mutually and inextricably related. The health of the people depends on the health of the land and ocean and vice versa. If one relation is disturbed or wounded, the whole is disturbed and wounded.
- Relationality is a principle of ‘difference.’ A relational consciousness sees that difference is key to unity. Unity both differentiates and connects us. We can only know the self through the other (Meyer 2024, 47-58). While we are all distinct and different, negotiating, navigating, and respecting difference is the key to not only sustainability but also to the corrective balance of the whole. Things exist as a differentiated whole, not in isolated compartments. Therefore, one cannot exist without the other. It is a consciousness that is not afraid to delve into the depth of difference in order to find the meaning of being together.

- Relationality is a principle of ‘balance.’ A relational consciousness sees life as structured around and through interweaving of tensions and contradictions. Relationality therefore is the sum of unity and distinction, connection and difference, communality and individuality. These contradictions should not be treated as competing opposites that must be eliminated but rather tensions that mutually coexist to help people navigate potential shocks and multiple convergences and opportunities.
- Relationality is a principle of ‘continuity.’ A relational consciousness sees life as a continuum with never ending flow of relationships that operates in the world of probabilities. Relationality helps us to live and navigate that continuum by recognising opportunities in moments of shocks and risks. Within that continuum, relationality embraces the continuities in between communality and individuality, self and relations, secular and sacred, God and the world, peace and conflict, which normally do not have clear separation lines.

In other words, relationality is a universal principle that activates the universal ethic of love, or alofa, loloma, aloha, found in all Pasifika cultures. Love is at the heart of the corrective balance. The goal of relationality is the ‘whole of life’ (see Aiava 2024, 323-337). Disaster management and mitigation systems in many communities in the Pasifika household are built on the foundation of relationality. This is key to ensuring the survival and stability of the collective whole. From reading the signs and indicators of natural hazards, to food security, to adaptation and collective resilience, to managing conflicts and risks, all of these contribute to constantly testing, challenging, and firming up the relational consciousness. This is why understanding relationality has to be key to the current climate discourse. In this chapter, because the above relational principles are interrelated and therefore cannot be deal with separately, they will be used simultaneously throughout.

Competing contradiction

Today’s climate discourse is heavily shaped by a one-sided approach to climate change that generally dismisses the value of understanding life within the flow of contradictions. The spiritual and the secular for example, which are normally seen as a healthy contradiction from a relational itulagi, are often seen as difficult to balance when it comes to development. Therefore, one has to be eliminated. In this case, the spiritual has to go. Several scholars have addressed the detrimental impact of this move on the Pasifika climate discourse (see Nunn 2017; Fair 2018; Lusama 2022), given that while the physical impacts on Pasifika are well documented “premised on reliable data and an effective integration of climate science into development plans and climate policy” (Anisi 2020, 2), the spiritual impact is less obvious. The concern therefore is not so much the role of science in the climate discourse, but rather that ‘science alone’ is not enough.

The current climate discourse is predominantly shaped by the Western philosophical tradition. The starting point for most Western philosophies and in particular metaphysics is the world of the self. At the heart of Western philosophies is the use of reason and scientific investigation to explore fundamental questions about the nature of reality and knowledge. Western philosophies depend on purely rational methods to investigate fundamental questions of life to arrive at wisdom (see Stewart 2021). Such an approach mainly focuses on ‘singularising reality’ and breaking down relations into ‘singular ones’ to form isolated compartments or binaries. This discursive action involves positioning these in ‘competition’ or ‘contradiction’ with each other in order to accurately construct and evaluate them to arrive at what is called ‘truth.’

Truth in this understanding is achieved only as a result of deduction and exclusion of the other in the competition. The idea is that the more we isolate and put things into competition, the more we accumulate information on their potential qualities, and the more truth is revealed. This is the ‘either-or’ approach that views reality in ‘competing contradictions’ where things can only be understood through logical deduction. It is a method characterised by a focus on elimination in order to easily define, verify, categorise, and extract something for the sake of scientific knowledge and data. It is an approach that has its roots with the Greek philosopher Aristotle, and was later refined by Western philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, Charles Darwin, and many others. In fact, our democratic values system is constructed on this idea of competition and elimination. Our development narrative and its indicators of growth are also built on this reward system of success through elimination.

Elimination is at the heart of colonisation. Coloniality comes from the root word ‘colon,’ meaning to digest. The colon implies that the best way to own and control people is to ‘consume’ them and take over their resources, including their knowledge systems, in order to easily impose a new one. This consuming only works when peoples and their knowledge are singularised and put into competition for the purpose of testing, and verification. The result is the emergence of a universal system of what I call ‘Onefication’ that centralises and controls benefits and resources under one cultural, economic, and political centre of power (Vaai 2021, 235ff). Onefication is an ultra-reductionist project that only works through the severing of links and the elimination of all other knowledge in favour of one. It posits that there is only one constituent source of truth and goodness. That is, everything, no matter how diverse, must dissolve into a singular reality and truth. In fact, this concept of ‘one truth’ was and still is the hallmark of Western cultures that continues to inform many of our development policies including climate change.

Policy making today unfortunately drives on this ‘competing contradiction’ approach rooted in the ‘either-or’ thinking because it is the most powerful and widely available and accepted approach. Today we see that almost all of the climate discussions from adaptation, to loss and damage, to security, revolve around singularised eliminative approaches.

Several consequences occur. We compartmentalise and pull apart elements of the climate story that should deeply intersect, and then we focus all our resources and energy on one at the expense of all others (Boege and Shibata 2020, 2-3). We sever the links from climate change to all other issues. For example, mining corporations with their counterparts in Pasifika assume that mining the deep-sea floor has no ecological implication for the land and people and of course climate change in terms of food security and the notion of inhabitability. We forget that a threat to land is also a threat to culture and identity, since these are mutually intertwined (Campbell 2024). And because of that, any mobility or relocation cannot view place or space as purely vacant since habitability cannot be reduced to material elements as it also includes the spiritual (Farbotko and Campbell 2022, 182). We mainstream climate security at the expense of spiritual security. We worry more about tangible losses and less about intangible losses (Chandra et al. 2023; Shibata et al. 2024). We put more spotlight on climate vulnerability and less on the resilience of communities in managing life in disaster and crisis prone situations. We even create a vulnerability and a “climate victimhood” narrative that often misrepresents “the strength, resiliency, and agency of Pacific island communities” (see Shibata et al. 2024, 13; Bryant-Tokalau 2018, 49), a narrative that many times is framed in someone else’s idea of vulnerability. Even our own Pasifika climate activists are caught in it, positing that Pasifika today is helpless and weak due to climate change.

The story is very different if we listen to those who live and fight climate change on the ground like Mahina from Kiribati. He said, “We are not drowning. We are not going to disappear. And we don’t want to be climate refugees. We don’t want to be pitied and we are not helpless” (see Shibata et al. 2024, 11). More direct is Taianui, also from Kiribati. “My island is becoming more and more famous because of climate change these days. I am often asked by white students, ‘Where are you from?’ And I answer, ‘Kiribati.’ And the first thing they say is, ‘Oh, that sinking island!’ I hate to be labelled like that. I want them to treat me with more respect” (Shibata et al. 2024, 11). This is a topic, as John R. Campbell correctly argues, that should be handled “with considerable care”, as Pasifika peoples “are not inherently vulnerable”; there is a need to redefine this concept and translate it into local Pasifika language to avoid the notion of ‘weak’ that comes with it (2022, 14).

It is important to note that most of the policies that use the method of ‘competing contradiction’ struggle to flourish in complex and multidimensional contexts. And by adopting this approach, what we are doing is making the resilience of communities look vulnerable and collective structures look weak. This is mostly notable in the climate relocation programmes and climate-related displacements that many researchers had unveiled such as relocation reports from the villages of Vunisinu, Vunidogoloa, and Narikoso in Fiji. Reports highlight the one common element that has been taken for granted by the governments and policy makers during the relocation processes: spirituality, the very core of community life and wellbeing (see Baleinakorodawa and Boege 2024; Yates et al. 2021; Anisi 2020; Shibata et al. 2024). Even the economic analysis done by some regional organisations to determine the costs of some relocations for example did not mention the costs of intangible loss, while others found the courage to at least put this into monetary value (Joliffe 2016). These are just a few examples of the many climate issues that reflect the inability of the idea of ‘competing contradiction’ to provide holistic solutions to one crisis in the face of a legion.

The wisdom of mutual contradiction

In order to create a strong system that can absorb and incorporate multiple shocks and crises, we need to develop a 'whole of life' approach that reflects the multidimensionality of communities grounded in the flow of unity and difference, the whole and the part, connection and disconnection. In this thought, understanding how contradictions move as part of life and contribute to the whole system is critically and fundamentally vital to creating a strong system to withstand hazards and climate shocks (Vaai and Casimira 2017; Vaai and Nabobo-Baba 2017; Boege 2022). The achievement of the 'whole of life' approach is its impact on the relationship of somewhat contradictory components of life to enable them to function mutually and simultaneously to provide corrective balance. The secular produces, spirit balances. The mind learns, body remembers. Difference innovates, unity anchors. High tide proposes, low tide disposes. Day expands, night contracts. Knowledge is discontinuous, wisdom is continuous. Fast gets all the attention and privilege, slow has all the power. Each component functions differently, but they cannot exist without the other. Imbalance occurs when the two are severed of their relationship and treated separately, which is currently the case with our development narrative. In the 'whole of life' vision, tensions and contradictions are never treated as enemies to be eliminated as seen in the Western philosophical tradition of logical deduction. Rather, keeping the tensions and contradictions ensures a healthy system and provides corrective balance to the whole.

This ability to navigate the climate crisis is possible because communities embrace the wisdom of 'mutual contradiction'. Here boundaries between worlds, such as the material and the spiritual, or living and dying, constantly move and shift to inform one another. There is always fluidity and negotiability, creating a world of continuity.

The starting point for Pasifika philosophies is the responsibility of and to the collective whole. This is why Pasifika philosophies view reality composed of 'mutual contradiction' where things are viewed as a complex and interconnected whole. Pasifika philosophies are deeply spiritual and employ more the 'both-and' approach in their pursuit of wisdom. Wisdom in this regard is achieved through negotiation and restraint, not logical deduction. This is to avoid singularising relations and elimination of the other. The goal of Pasifika philosophy therefore is not so much logical truth, but rather 'life' and 'wellbeing' (see Vaai 2024, 23-46).

If we would live in village communities, we would immediately notice that people operate on a different philosophical frequency. This is why sometimes they do not immediately react to the language of urgency and doom that envelopes the current climate discourse from UN policies to IPCC reports to international climate advocacies. This can be seen either as an obstruction or risk to international mitigative efforts. However, from the perspectives on the ground, sometimes such an emergency narrative either rushes communities to adopt strategies outside of their ethical and spiritual structures, or unfairly forces them to endorse unsustainable and unaffordable solutions.

The slowness to react to so-called international 'doom messages' is premised on the philosophies that underpin how they treat disasters. For example, while the world is worried about Kiribati drowning, climate change is already built into peoples' psyche that king tides and sea level rise are normal. This attitude does not mean they do not care or do not have the knowledge of emergency climate action. Rather it means that when you live on the ground, some things are not so much seen as emergency or threat to be eliminated, but rather contradictions that needed to be navigated.

This ability to navigate the climate crisis is possible because communities embrace the wisdom of 'mutual contradiction'. Here boundaries between worlds, such as the material and the spiritual, or living and dying, constantly move and shift to inform one another. There is always fluidity and negotiability, creating a world of continuity. That is why in many Pasifika cultures, peace and conflict, opportunity and risk, harmony and contradictions, affirmations and negations, are just different sides of each other, creating a coherent whole. They exist mutually as distinct moments within the continuum of life.

In this world of continuity, life is presented as a whole through the duality of conflicting moments. People who are trained in this wisdom have the ability to live and deal with conflicting moments. People grow up with the psyche that, 'I am in the land and land is in me.' And because of this co-inherence of everything, there is no security without spiritual security. No loss that is purely tangible in nature. Life operates in dealing with these moments. And communities' psyches are trained in the interflow of these moments such as calm and disaster, peace and conflict, life and death, connection and disconnection, autonomy and relations. In the spirit of relationality, duality is treated as relationally and inextricably linked. The co-inherence of the dimensions of life allows communities to view life as a fluid reality that moves in a complementary way. This permits us to see people as 'plural ones' rather than 'singular ones', and life more as a plural integrated whole than just a single entity.

Those who aim to work in complex systems and structures such as those found in Pasifika need to be equipped with this 'both-and' principle in order to be able to navigate complexity and multiplicity. We need to be trained to see the other hidden dimension. There is conflict, not just peace. Darkness, not just light. Spiritual, not just the material. Dying, not just living. Communities value these contradictions in many areas of life such as leadership, education, politics, or economics. The constant crossings of the spiritual and the material worlds, the mutual co-existence of the domestic and the wild, the human and non-human, the tangible and intangible, are not there so we can select and glorify one and vilify and eliminate the other. Rather, they are there to teach us resilience and to know the value of embracing the harmony of the 'whole' (Iemaima Vaai 2023).

For example, when I grew up in both inland and coastal villages in Samoa, we were taught wisdom sayings such as *e momoe ma manū ae sau mala e atia'e* meaning 'we sleep in fortune to be awakened by misfortune'; *e sosoo maninoa ma afā* meaning 'calmness is just next to storms'; *aua nei seetia oe ile malū ole tai taeao* meaning 'do not be deceived by the stillness of the morning tide'; *a lotaluta le gataifale sisi le la afa, ae a agi fisaga sisi le la fala*, meaning 'in strong tides raise the sinnet sail, and in easterly winds raise the mat sail.' I didn't know at the time how important these proverbs were to climate adaptation and resilience until I was forced to reflect on them during my own research. These wisdom sayings are adaptation pointers. They speak to the 'both-and' knowledge of communities, that apparently paradoxical concepts and mutual contradictions such as calm and disaster are meant to overlap and are often mutually intertwined before our very eyes. Thus, the sayings call us to never focus on just one dimension of life. They call us away from the 'either-or' eliminative knowledge that often ends up in favouring one while eliminating the other.

This wisdom of 'mutual contradiction' is not new. From Papua New Guinea, Bernard Narokobi, for example, highlighted this idea in 1983 as follows.

Our vision, conflicting and harmonious at the same time, was not and still is not an artificially dichotomised and compartmentalised pragmatism of the secular society. Ours is a vision of totality, a vision of cosmic harmony ... that sees the human person in his totality with the spirit world as well as the animal and the plant world. (Narokobi 1983, 10)

From a Samoan perspective, Tui Atua added to the same chorus as follows:

Allusion and allegory are essential to Samoan religious culture because thesis and antithesis co-exist as synthesis. The contradictory versions of creation are not invalidated by contradiction. They are sustained by the many meanings suggested by allegory and allusion. (Tui Atua 2018, 92)

Today our failure to learn this 'whole of life' wisdom and to realize continuity in contradictions in many areas of climate change is the main driver behind the failure to attract more realistic and practical climate actions. If we need to navigate a hopeful future, we need to pour more resources into research in this area.

“We are just having a bath”: Living in probabilities

In many Pasifika communities, the wisdom of ‘mutual contradiction’ comes from their perception of life. Because of the relational ‘whole of life’ philosophy, life operates more around probabilities and opportunities than in certainties. Sustainability is born from the resilience found in the midst of these probabilities and opportunity is born in the womb of potential risks. Opportunity is normally found in the corridors of uncertainties. Unpredictability. Insecurities. Conflicts. These are the birthing grounds of resilience. Because of the centrality of relationships, we have to allow space for flexibility and multiple movements of creativity and restoration, for the sake of care, even if it involves risks.

In these communities, elimination is not a proper response to risks and hazards. Rather, the focus is put on collective resilience. Although they do not hope for conflict, they know that life is never without conflict. Conflict is woven into the psyche that informs ecological awareness and attentiveness. The inclusion of conflict in peoples’ consciousness invites them to live mindfully ‘in-between’ time to always be ready for the convergence of peace and conflict.

I have discovered this idea of living in probabilities in many Pasifika communities. The most recent is from an experience I had in Nalase in Fiji. This is reconfirmed from a story told by Setela Rasiga, a student of the Young Academics programme of the Pacific Theological College (PTC) from the village of Nalase, that expresses this wisdom. This is also one of the communities that hosts the communities engagement component of the Pasifika Philosophies Course run by PTC. According to Rasiga,

Flooding is a common challenge in my village. Flooding can happen if there’s too much rain. But over the years even high tides push water onto the village grounds. Sometimes, in the clear light of day, Nalase and neighbouring Vunisinu are flooded. With frequent flooding comes soil erosion. For many years we’ve waited for a concrete seawall to arrive. The floodgates came first. But the floodgates have given up. Broken down, they submit to the strength of the tide. But we understand that the Government has many to assist. How can we be resilient in the face of the floods? The impact of floods and wet village grounds including homes sinking into the mud is common. Should we just relocate? Or can we be resilient? After all, it’s part of my province’s psyche that the floods are not a bad thing. It says, *keitou sili waca la. We are just having a bath.* If there ever was a statement of resilience for my people and my province, this was it. (Rasiga 2023)

For the Nalase people, flooding normally comes into their houses. However, relocation is never an option. Instead, they stay in the houses, moving around in the flooded house, dragging their feet so that mud does not settle on the floor when the flood recedes. During the flood, the security and wellbeing of each household are monitored communally to minimise deaths. Their climate responses are therefore not only informed by their integrated philosophies, but they are also encouraged by communal responsibilities and collective resilience.

Hence their axiom, *keitou sili waca la – during floods, we are just having a bath.* The Nalase villagers know that floods bring about soil rejuvenation which has helped them in many years of agricultural success. And instead of going far to gather food, the flood normally brings food to them, including the *mana*, the mud crab which is their main delicacy. So post-flood is often a time of celebration and thanking God for both the community’s safety and provision. In other words, resilience is not just about responding to disasters for these communities. Resilience is their way of resisting the one-dimensional story epidemic that is shaping our development agendas.

What is shared here does not remove the importance of institutionalised climate strategies. Nor should it remove the fact that rich countries and corporations must be held responsible for the acceleration of climate change whose impact affects our low-lying island countries. Nor am I suggesting that all communities are the same, and therefore possess the same form of resilience. We need to renew our strategies to continue to

call out rich countries and corporations to be held accountable. We need to do whatever it takes to avoid dangerous climate tipping points. However, we cannot do this without incorporating the philosophies, ethics, and spiritualities that determine the lifeblood of many communities. We cannot just impose policies, shaped by simplistic one-dimensional philosophies, on communities that were created and fashioned for centuries by relational multidimensional philosophies and spiritualities that gave them a different perception of life. While policy makers will struggle, communities also will find it hard to implement these policies.

Pause and the ethic of restraint

Science and spirituality are meant to be allies in the fight to provide climate solutions. The former providing the cues and signs and the latter providing the ethical response. While the climate discourse is heavily scientific, we need to start focusing on life-centred philosophies and ethics for the sake of balance. These philosophies and ethics are the veins in which spirituality flows into our communities and back again. One of those is the ethic of restraint. This is a relational ethic common in many indigenous communities as a guide when dealing with relationships with the self, with others, or with nature. Because of relationality, all communities do allow development initiatives to progress as long as they are conducted under the vision of corrective balance which is key to regenerative growth. A vision where production and protection go hand in hand. This cannot be realised unless there is an ethical and moral system in place to help slow down development to balance and harmonise the relationship of the collective whole, but also to monitor greed and selfishness. Stewart Brand in his writing on pace layer structuring argues that in any healthy society, while the fastest components such as commerce, fashion, and infrastructure for example often focus on innovation and production, the slowest such as culture and nature act as stabilisers (2018). In other words, the faster components not only must respect the slowest, mechanisms must also be put in place to ensure corrective harmony.

In many Pasifika communities, restraint summons the will to 'wait' or to 'pause.' Our forebears knew well that anything that involves production is prone to the enticement of an expanding ego. Especially when it is a system that implicates benefits and privileges. The former sets the scene for wealth and value, and the latter for advantages and power. Hence, the need for an ethic of restraint. In communities, restraint is reflected everywhere in nature. An example is the coconut. According to 'Amanaki Havea in his 'Coconut Theology', the coconut is a symbol of slowness in Pasifika cultures. 'Coconut time' represents the notion of 'waiting' for nature's own time. Thus, the coconut falls in its own right time. We cannot force the coconut to fall (Havea 1986, 14). This expresses Pasifika people's attitude to growth and development. They have to be aligned to nature's pace.

Here the most powerful agent of growth is, surprisingly, not production. Rather, it is Pause! Pause requires restraint, which includes waiting and resting. Restraint is a universal principle of life found in all societies. It is supposed to be central to health and wellbeing, agriculture, economy, even to rights and entitlements. Unfortunately, slowing down seems an anathema to neoliberal capitalism that is behind the human-induced climate crisis as it could potentially mean less profit, less growth, and less production. It is therefore no surprise that we suffer today from the climate consequences of such a neoliberal capitalist system (see Fox and Casimira 2023, 5-34).

While in reality pause gives off an air of 'inaction,' an active natural process of regeneration and renewal normally occurs. Pause privileges beauty in contradictions. It nurses growth through contraction. It embraces the sacredness of everyone and everything. It allows time for relatedness. It maintains space for those who cannot keep up. It is an all-time restorative healer. Rushing violates the relational integrated make-up of communities, and values human economic development over ecological wellbeing, and money over people. The ethic of restraint gives off a warning when components of society do not function in a corrective harmony.

The following ecological and ethical concepts reflect the ethic of restraint throughout the Pasifika household in order to manage production and risks for the sake of corrective harmony. Concepts such as *vakatabu* in Fiji (see Naisele 2024, 179ff), *faasao* in Samoa, *fakatapui* in Tonga, *imasua/hna masuan* in the Lifou dialect, Kanaki New Caledonia, *talutabu* in Solomon Islands, *okai* and *otaba* in Kiribati, *rau'i* in Cook Islands, and *fono* and *fakiri* in Rotuma. All these concepts reflect pause, rest, control, and wait. These are not only put in place to respect inaction and rest for land or sea, but also mechanisms to disrupt the cycle of extraction and exploitation for the sake of regeneration. Because of the wounds caused by removal of anything from land or sea, sustainable growth requires a rotational and re-generational strategy for the sake of corrective balance. So, in Samoa for example, *faasao* is a practice of restraint to ensure land and sea rest. And by letting the land and sea rest, we allow the spiritual realm to once again reconnect to heal and regenerate the physical.

Harmony and balance are not romantic notions of a bygone time that needed to be revived again. Rather they are key relational principles of life that are central to corrective balance, and therefore growth and wellbeing. The role of the ethics of restraint is to ensure that the four integrated harmonies are achieved. The harmony with land, the harmony with the self, the harmony with people, and the harmony with God (Tui Atua 2018, 137-151). We cannot talk about the harmony with God if we are extracting and destroying Fanua. We cannot talk about the harmony with the self if we are destroying other people(s). This means that our autonomies and wellbeing as individuals must always be tested against the other three harmonies. When we fail to perform this test, not only do we commit sin and evil against the cosmic household, we also destroy the harmony of the whole. However, when restraint is practiced and corrective balance is achieved Pasifika people call it *sautū* (Fiji), *lagimālie* (Samoa), *māfana* (Tonga), *aloha* (Hawaii), to name a few. Hence is the 'whole of life.'

Surprisingly, this system is also present in the bible, and I believe also in many other religions. It is called the 'Sabbath.' Sabbath is more than just a day of rest. It is an ethical principle of restraint put in place by God not only to manage ecological risks and improve harmony, but also to control and monitor greed and abuse of anything, whether it's the self, others, or God's creation. It is required for the regeneration and restoration of everything. In other words, any development without restraint is not only ungodly, it is not relational and spiritual.

The ethic of restraint calls for a (k)new[4] global ethical system to constantly manage production and risks. Such an ethic must be incorporated into the economic and climate strategies of governments. This is not the first time this call is heard. Many eco-theologians who are from Pasifika or write about Pasifika have called for a new focus on ethics and spirituality, especially in the time of the climate crisis (see Moe-Lobeda 2024; Tofaeono 2000; Zachariah 2010; Tuwera 2002; Lusama 2004 & 2022; Bird 2001; Mahina 2023; Sopena 2023, Halapua 2010). The 'Pasifika household of God', an ethical framework mentioned before, guides the churches to be more equipped with radical responses to complex and multifaced ethical issues such as climate change that destroy the household. Since then, this household framework has underpinned some of the key ethical programmes endorsed by the Pasifika churches to address ecological and climate issues such as 'Reweaving the Ecological Mat' (REM), the 'Whole of Life Way,' 'Leadership for Justice,' 'Climate Indigenous Knowledge,' and 'Changing the Story of Development', to name a few.

In the global arena, theologians like Hans Kung led the movement to create the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* which was finally adopted by the 'Parliament of the World's Religions' in 1993. Despite the fact that climate change does not appear in the declaration, it outlines exactly what we need today to address the climate crisis. That is, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness through respect of each other and everything is critical to the wellbeing of the collective whole (Parliament of the World Religions 1993, 2-3).

[4] Refers to the wisdom of ancient/new. A renewed realisation that our future is dependent upon appreciation of the old. What we already knew and experienced as life-affirming.

The declaration does not reflect the ethic of restraint. However, it certainly highlights the ethical foundations developed before us that can be used to strengthen our call for climate justice. Since the development of this global ethic, it seems there is no 'global climate ethic' that would guide the search for climate solutions, especially one that takes into serious consideration the ethic of restraint of the many indigenous communities worldwide. In other words, it will be a struggle to achieve a realistic and multifaceted solution to the polycrisis without a global ethic. A global climate ethic is perhaps the most practical contribution that multiple world religions and indigenous communities around the world can contribute at this time of the polycrisis (see Kumar and Sharma 2024, 83-107). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to develop a global climate ethics, which we hope would be the next step. However, I think there are two important reasons why we needed a global climate ethic. First is that such an ethic should generate awareness of a much-needed pause not only to allow space for personal repentance but also to provide mechanisms for political and social repentance towards shared action and responsibility (see Neil 2024, 11f). Second it is the hope that the principles of relationality provided in the beginning of this chapter would set the foundation for the next step, in which the ethic of restraint has to be integrated holistically.

Conclusion

The good news is that there is more and more recognition of communities-based knowledge to address the climate crisis as reflected in the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Assessment Reports III (2001), IV (2007), V (2014), and VI (2022). While this is welcome, the issue is that as long as the climate change discourse is continually underpinned by Western philosophical framing, we will continue to struggle to implement this knowledge, especially in Pasifika. We need a new foundational philosophy for the climate discourse. One that is holistic and relational. We need to move beyond the language of "recognising" indigenous knowledge, treating it as an optional resource, to actually unburying and mainstreaming it as an approach for understanding and creating climate change policies and strategies. But in order to achieve this, we need to move the climate discourse away from the control of the Onefication thinking. Three things are required.

First is for us to acknowledge and understand that relationality underpins the understanding of life and all issues in the Pasifika household. It is critically important that Pasifika starts reframing climate change from a relational itulagi to ensure the development of an approach on how to articulate and frame climate policies and frameworks in the light of ethics and spirituality (Boege 2018, 11-12). One of the examples of this reframing is the *Certificate in Philosophical Competency: Pasifika 'Whole of Life' Philosophies for a New Development Consciousness* course that is offered through PTC to train regional and international policy makers and educators on the role of Pasifika relational philosophies, ethics, spiritualities in transforming development.

Second is to treat climate change as a spiritual and ethical issue, not just a scientific or economic issue, moving it away from the control of the one-sided secular framing. In this respect, because of relationality, we can never confine the climate change discourse to the physical material dimensions alone; rather, we have to take into serious consideration the spiritual dimension that shapes the being and structure of the multiple relationships in the household.

Third is to reframe climate change from the perspective of the 'whole of life' itulagi of Pasifika communities. Moving it away from the 'either-or' competitive and eliminative framing in order to make it an integrated issue that requires multifaceted solutions. Part of this is treating climate change as a complex and multidimensional issue that requires a multifaceted approach. Moving it away from the idea of a 'single greatest threat' and treating it as a 'global multifaceted threat.' A holistic response that respects the differentiated yet inextricable harmony of the whole is one that keeps the tensions and contradictions for the sake of balance.

The hope is from here we would be able to develop a 'global climate ethic' that would provide balance in the current climate discourse to help propose practical solutions to the polycrisis.

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