Burying the Past—Healing the Land: Ritualising Reconciliation in Fiji

Enterrer le passé – Guérir la terre : la ritualisation de la réconciliation à Fidji

Enterrar el pasado, curar la tierra: la ritualización de la reconciliación en Fidji

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The *Tabua*: Conveyor of Death and Atonement

In the Fiji Museum's permanent exhibition "Mission" there is a glass cabinet with an old *tabua* (whale's tooth), yellowed and darkened with age, and the *magimagi* (plaited pandanus string) it was presented with. An exhibit note states: "Tabua presented by chief's [sic] and people of Navuso to the Methodist Church early this century, to atone for their responsibility for the murders of Thomas Baker and his followers." Another exhibit note, *The Thomas Baker Tragedy*, explains what happened:

In 1867 Rev. Thomas Baker, a Fijian Minister Setareki Seileka and six out of eight Fijian student teachers from Davuilevu were hacked to death and eaten at Nubutautau in Central Vitilevu. While the murders of Fijian mission teachers in Fiji were not uncommon at that time, the murder of a European missionary was unique, Mr Baker being the only Methodist Missionary to be killed by followers of Fijian religion. He and his followers were not slain because they were Christians, but because the Navatuisila Chief—A Christian Chief who felt slighted when Baker decided to hold a meeting at Lomanikoro instead of Navuso, and who had sent a Tabua into the mountains requesting the missionary's murder. The Baker party thus perished at the hands of pagan Fijians on the request of a Christian convert. The European Missionaries in Fiji, while they were often reviled and threatened in the early decades at the mission, seem to have been largely immune from direct attack, but the same was not true of their Fijian converts, many of whom were killed by followers of Fijian religion, particularly after Christianity began to take a hold, and to threaten the authority of chiefs and priests.

Next to the *tabua* in the cabinet is a colour group photograph with a note that reads, "Rev. Thomas Baker's Great Grandniece Lynn Flaherty and her immediate family at Nubutautau, Navosa on November 13th 2003, during the Forgiveness Ceremony." So a *tabua* was the conveyor of Baker's death, and other *tabua* were conveyors of subsequent ritual atonements for the deed.

This article discusses the high-profile, widely and internationally publicised traditional reconciliation ceremony staged in the interior of Fiji's main island of Vitilevu in November 2003. The article is concerned with the ritual and symbolic importance of the event and people's faith and beliefs in relation to it. It discusses

the centrality of people's sense of identity as belonging to the Land of their clan and forefathers.

Mainstream Christians in Fiji may have a strong Christian faith yet at the same time honour and believe in ancestral spiritual power as an intrinsic part of their identity. Yahweh is God and paramount but this does not discount the presence and efficacy of ancestral spirits. From this perspective disordered social relations, crime and infertility of the land are seen as emanating from disordered relations with ancestral spirits and *vanua*, to be reconciled through traditional rituals of transformation and healing. To Fijian Pentecostal Christians such problems are considered the result of spiritual bondage by demonic forces—to be exorcised through Pentecostal rituals of transformation and healing.

The article describes how these quite different perspectives see human agency as reflected in the state of the land and in people's social relations, past and present. It discusses how human agency is seen to spiritually disturb or reconcile the land, its innate ancestral powers and their influence on people's relations and the land. It discusses how the efficacy of ancestral spirituality of the land may affect change, punishing or rewarding people's actions. And it discusses how the redeeming power of the Holy Spirit can bring about change through exorcising the land of ancestral spiritual power, cleansing and un-blocking what Pentecostal Christians describe as demonic spiritual strongholds.

Belonging to the Land

People in Fiji are bound to one another through *vanua*. *Vanua* means many things—land, place, clan, people, tradition and country. To talk of *vanua* is to talk not only of land in its material form, but land as Place of Being, as Place of Belonging, as spiritual quality. *Vanua* is both land and sea, the soil, plants, trees, rocks, rivers, reefs; the birds, beasts, fish, gods and spirits that inhabit these places and the people who belong there, bound to one another and to the land as guardians of this God-given world. *Vanua* is a relational concept that encompasses all this, paths of relationship, nurture and mutual obligations connecting place and people with the past, the present and the future.

People are always and at all times connected to one another through their belonging to a particular clan that has historical, social, cultural and spiritual ties to a particular place, a particular part of the land. Whatever a person does will reflect on all the other members of the clan in the present as well as the future, just as the actions of deceased clan members still reflect on the clan as a whole today. Crime, sin and disorder or “brokenness” in any part of the clan or by any clan member at any time therefore reflects on the whole.

In discussing the “sacredness” of soil, Matt Tomlinson (2002: 246) writes of how soil was considered by a Methodist minister on the island of Kadavu to be “*bibi* (‘heavy’, connoting ‘important’) because the elders are buried in it”.

Essentially, the soil contains ancestral spirituality and is therefore potentially dangerous. On the other hand, it connects people of the present to the intrinsic strength of kinship relations and thus to the power of the ancestors.

This sense of “heaviness” can therefore be viewed positively as well as negatively, depending on a person’s Christian beliefs, *i.e.* whether being Christian entails negating that which is pre-Christian as being of the devil, or viewing one’s ancestral connections as being an important element of one’s identity in the present. Another man, drawing also on imagery from Genesis, gave another explanation of why soil was considered to have special significance in Fiji:

First, God built Adam from soil. Second, ancestors fought over it. (This seems to be both a reflection and a cause of soil’s importance). Third, he explained, the earth was created before everything else, according to the Bible’s story of creation: before water, before animals, before humankind, land was brought into being. (Tomlinson 2002: 246-247)

Tomlinson (2002: 247) points out that “linguistically, the sense that the land is seen to act *upon* people—that land is an agent which can affect humans, that land is *mana*—is expressed in certain phrases”.

If relations among the people or between different *vanua* are in a state of disorder, so too is the land in a state of disorder. Polluted or disordered relations between people are also a polluting of the land. Disordered social relations and disordered relations to the land can effectuate *kalouca* (lit. evil spirit), sickness and death in a clan, in subsequent generations too, until the customary ritual of reconciliation has been performed and accepted. A healing of relations between people therefore involves healing the land.

Burying the Past

The whale’s tooth (*tabua*), Fijian anthropologist Asesela Ravuvu explains (1987: 23):

represents everything that is valuable and worthwhile in Fijian society. It embodies everything that is chiefly in nature, including chiefly behaviour and social valued chiefly qualities... [it] also possesses a mystical power that makes it much more sacred than any other object of ceremonial offering... the “whale’s tooth” is potent and has *mana* or power to effect good or ill when offered and accepted... [causing]... the intrinsic value of a particular “whale’s tooth” to vary according to circumstances and the relative status of offerer and recipient.

There are three main terms in Standard Fijian for rituals or ceremonies of reconciliation—*isoro*, *matanigasau* and *ibulubulu*—all of which share the same ritual structure, involving the presentation of one or more *tabua* (whale’s tooth)

and other valuables such as kava roots¹ and mats (sometimes meat, such as cow, and drums of kerosene) by *vanua* representatives of the clan responsible for a crime, to clan representatives of the victim.

The three terms are used interchangeably, as is notable in the different newspaper reports of the Reverend Baker reconciliation and in my interviews with those involved. However, in general Fijian perceptions of reconciliation derive from the term *ibulubulu* which means burial, grave, that which covers it; that which is under the earth. *Ibulubulu* comes from the word *bulu* which means to cover with earth, to bury, and Bulu was also the pre-Christian name for the underworld of death (cf. Williams [1858] 1985: 243). When used in relation to forgiveness and reconciliation, figuratively speaking, *bulubulu* means to bury an injury. The offering of a *tabua* as a token of peace is then also *ibulubulu* (Capell 1991: 19 & 17).

“People talk of ‘bulu kina na ca’—evil being buried by it (the *tabua*)” (Geraghty 2006, pers comm). Implicit in this is the common understanding that once the appropriate ritual of reconciliation has taken place between clan representatives of perpetrator and the victim, grievances are considered buried, laid to rest—forgotten (a term frequently used).

The Blessings of the Land

If my people... humble themselves and... turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear them from Heaven, will forgive their sins, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7: 14)

The November 2003 reconciliation ceremony in the area where Thomas Baker was killed in 1867 was a widely and internationally publicised traditional ritual of reconciliation, with reports reaching Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, European—even Vietnamese—newspapers, and with coverage on Australian TV. Eleven descendents of Thomas Baker were invited to Fiji to receive, together with descendants of Baker’s Fijian assistants who were killed with him, the ritual apologies of the people of Navatusila.

In anticipation of the ceremony *FijiSun* newspaper, the paper that reported most extensively on this event, noted in a Comment entitled “Lifting the curse”:

November 13 will be a day of liberation for the whole *vanua* of Navatusila in Navosa. This will be the day when they converge at Nubutautau to traditionally apologise to the families of Reverend Thomas Baker and eight other [Fijian] families [whose ancestors] were killed and eaten by their ancestors, 136 years ago. From the day Reverend Baker and his missionaries were killed, the *vanua* of Navatusila has been under a curse (*FijiSun* 10/11/03: 4).

1. Kava (*yagona*), a mildly narcotic drink made from the dried and pulverised roots of the piper methysticum plant, plays a central role in sealing traditional ritual transactions in Fiji. When presented as an exchange valuable, the whole, dried roots are presented in special presentation bundles.

An Associated Press news bulletin from Australia noted somewhat dryly: “The Australian descendants of a Christian missionary eaten by cannibals 136 years ago will travel to Fiji this week, hoping to help lift a curse on the village where he was killed. Residents say they have had bad luck since Baker was consumed and they blame his avenging spirit” (*FijiSun* 13/11/03: 10).

According to the *Fiji Times* (12/11/03: 3) some 200-300 guests attended the Baker reconciliation ceremony. The seven villages involved had spent F\$10,000 on “beautifying their settlements” (amongst other things installing new toilets and bathrooms to host the guests, including then Prime Minister Qarase)², and preparing food and gifts for the reconciliation ceremony. The villagers had collected 10 cows, 30 *tabua* (whales teeth) and fine mats to be presented to the Australian visitors, the two chiefly households and the descendants of the local missionaries (*ibid.*).

The ceremony started with a church service conducted by the ACCF, the Association of Christian Churches in Fiji. The ACCF, a joint organisation of Pentecostal churches and the Methodist Church in Fiji, came into being in 2001 as a response to the moral and spiritual disorder among Fijians brought about by the coup Fiji experienced in 2000 (Kacimaiwai, interview 2004). Usurping the mandate of the Fiji Council of Churches which includes the Catholic and Anglican churches, this increasingly influential organisation is comprised of almost all Protestant churches in Fiji, that is to say almost half the population. A particular focus of the ACCF is a Pentecostal healing of the land and exorcism of the ancestral spiritual power inherent in the land.

While the 2003 Baker reconciliation in outer form was a traditional Fijian reconciliation ceremony prior to the event ACCF pastors had been engaged in preparing the people of this area beforehand, through Pentecostal prayer and ritual to confess their sins and reconcile with God, which would lead to healing the land and social relations.

After the church service the traditional ceremony took place, ending with a lavish feast. The villagers sought forgiveness from the paramount chief of the province of Naitasiri, Turaga Qaranivalu Ratu Inoke Takiveikata, the [chiefly] Mataiwelagi household of Bau and the relatives of the local missionaries who were killed with Baker (*Fiji Times* (12/11/03: 3).

The Sunday Post reporter noted that when the most important *tabua* had been presented by the *Tui* (chief) of Navatusila, asking for forgiveness for the deeds of his forefathers and asking for his people to be released from the curse that they had been under since,

2. Former Methodist Church president Reverend Josateki Koroi warned that this high profile event would end up creating more poverty and financial problems for the villagers (*Fiji Times* 5/11/03: 3), see also *Fiji Times* 10/11/03: 2, 17/11/03: 6, 29/11/03: 6, *Fiji Sun* 27/8/03: 1, 18/11/03: 4, 27/11/03: 4.

a prayer was said asking for the blessing of the land and its people from that day onwards. The sunny day was... broken minutes later as dark clouds hovered around the village, opening up for intermittent rain. The people of Navatusila took it as a sign... that their apology had been accepted and acknowledged by the Almighty. They linked the events to a passage in the Bible, in the Old Testament [2 Chronicles 7: 14]. (*The Sunday Post* 14/11/03: 13)

All three of the interwoven elements of what in Fiji is known as the Three Pillars structure were in play in the reconciliation ceremony. The interweaving of *vanua* with Christianity (*lotu*) in Fiji is historically linked with a third entity, *matanitu*, which once denoted chiefly governance, developed into meaning colonial government and now, somewhat ambiguously and unclearly, relates to government and nation as well as traditional chiefly power. This tripartite structure, known as the Three Pillars, comprises the overarching ideology of Fijian society, around which village life centres, and which people in urban as well as rural contexts constantly refer to, and which is also constantly referred to at national level and in the media.

Yet this is a predominantly Fiji Methodist religio-cultural ideal structure that came into being during the colonial period (1874-1970). Contemporary interpretations of this structure converge in a highly volatile political issue prevalent in Fijian nationalist politics since 1987 and exacerbated during and since the coup in 2000: whether Fiji should constitutionally be declared a Christian state (*cf.* Ryle 2005; 2009; 2010: 53-63).

The *vanua* was present in the guise of the people and their chiefs; the Church was present, and the Government was represented by amongst others then Prime Minister Qarase. According to *The Daily Post* the Prime Minister emphasised precisely the interconnectedness of the Three Pillars, saying that the reconciliation ceremony “brought together the three solid foundations of Fiji society: the Church, Government and culture (*vanua, lotu, matanitu*) [sic]”. (*The Daily Post* 15/11/03: 5)

The Politics of Representing the Past

Because Reverend Baker was a “European” (*i.e.* white) missionary his killing (and the killing of his Fijian assistants) by pagan Fijians—and the fact that he was subsequently also cannibalised, as were his assistants—has been given considerably more prominence, for example in being part of a permanent exhibition in the Fiji Museum, than the killing of Tongan missionaries by the people of Kaba, publicly atoned for in a reconciliation ritual at the Methodist Church Conference in 2003 (*cf.* *The Daily Post*: 28/8/03: 5).

In a letter to the editor of the *Sunday Times* shortly after the Baker reconciliation ceremony Andrew Thornley, who has researched extensively into the history

of the Methodist Church in Fiji, brought the Baker killing into the wider historical and political context of Fiji mission history. Thornley has a very clear account in his latest book of what happened to Baker—and why (Thornley 2002: 337–35). Thornley’s point was that the people of Navatusila in 19th century Fiji saw Baker as connected with Eastern Fiji chiefly power (as indeed the Methodist mission was) and understandably felt threatened:

I was moved by pictures of Navosa people shown on Australian TV as they sought forgiveness from the descendants of Thomas Baker, killed at Gagdelavatu with nine Fijians in 1867. Considerable wealth in the form of traditional gifts was passed from the hands of villagers in their effort to remove what they felt to be more than 100 years of ill luck. The humility of the Fijians was clearly evident, however, the written evidence of history demonstrates that, for their part, the descendents of Baker just as much needed to seek forgiveness from the Navosa people. For Thomas Baker irresponsibly ignored advice, notably from knowledgeable Fijians, to continue his journey across Viti Levu in 1867. The people of the neighbouring district of Dawarau warned Baker that [because of] the situation inland [it] was too dangerous to proceed. For a number of reasons, but partly because the advice came from traditional non-Christian sources, Baker chose to ignore the warnings. So Baker came into Gagadelavatu, the chief town of Navosa, near the site of present-day Nabutautau, as an unwelcome visitor. He was seen as an agent of the Christian chief Seru Cakobau who had waged war and tried to conquer the interior [of Viti Levu]. The time was not rife for Baker to take nine Fijians into hostile territory. Baker knew the risk and he did not tell his wife where he was going, so unsure was he of the territory and the minds of the people. In view of these circumstances, which I have considerably summarized from my longer account in the book *Exodus of the i Taukei*... the people of Navosa had little option but to view Baker’s motives from a traditional and cultural point. The perceived agents of Bau’s influence had to be removed. Baker’s death was, of course, sad. More to the point, it could have been avoided if Baker had exercised reasonable judgment. So the blame for the missionary’s death does not only lie with the people of Navosa. Forgiveness is needed from both sides (*The Sunday Times* 23/11/03: 6).

Thornley’s letter highlights how closely history, the past and the present, the local and the global are linked in the ways in which the past is portrayed in the present. The entanglement and use of the past in the present are evident in the examples given here of people’s desire to conduct traditional reconciliation rituals—and not least in their staging and performance, their perceived efficacy, and the responses they engendered. The fact that we can only access the past from the present, and the interweaving of history, tradition, Christianity and politics in the different re-presentations of what happened then and in “the present” (*i.e.* 1867 and 2003) are similarly evident in all examples³.

3. I thank John Barker for referring me to Errington and Gewertz 1995 for a comparable example of a re-enactment of the arrival of missionary George Brown to the Duke of York Islands in 1875. See also Weir 2000.

Reconciling Land and People

The traditional rituals of forgiveness and reconciliation described here are concerned with the restoration of balanced reciprocal relations between people and between people and the land resonate with similar cosmological understandings in many other cultures and among peoples across the Pacific Island region and elsewhere in the world. People's need to maintain balanced relations with their ancestors and the spirit world through observing particular rituals and rules of conduct to appease spirits, placating them through ritual sacrifices (or, as in this case, ritual presentations) remains, albeit changing over time, interwoven in people's lives in syncretic religious belief (see Strathern and Stewart 2004: 91). This is what Gary Trompf (1994 in *ibid.*: 93) terms as "the logic of retribution". Strathern and Stewart capture the gist of this by relating it to the popular term, "there is no such thing as a free lunch" (*ibid.*).

In Melanesia, Trompf (1991: 158) writes, "the dead are almost without exception understood to continue their involvement with the living. Avengement is commonly thought to 'exorcise' a spirit of its inimical aspects, turning it into a supportive agent". "Throughout most of Oceania... the helpful deceased are those who have received the proper funerary rites, while troublesome ghosts arise from those not properly disposed of or from those expected to carry their grievances beyond death" (Trompf 1995: 131).

Although Trompf is describing the reasoning behind *avengement* of wrongdoing as being the means of transforming negative spiritual powers to positive, so central in Melanesian contexts, rites of reconciliation in Fiji seek to do the same. Brokenness between clans needs to be restored through rites of reconciliation that will heal social relations, relations with the spirit world and the land, *i.e.* reconciliation will bring nourishment and fertility to the social barrenness of human relations and the material barrenness of the land—and will transform the powers of the spirit world from "inimical" to "supportive".

Bakker (1986: 200-202) notes (in relation to the disordering of clan relations on account of elopement) that the concept of *duka* (dirt, pollution) in Fijian is equated with disorder of social relations and *savasava* (clean, pure; cleansing, purification) with their reconciliation and re-ordering through rituals of reconciliation.

So the reciprocal relations between different clans are linked to one another and kept in balance through spiritual links to *vanua*. In any situation of *vanua* transgression the subsequent presentation of a *tabua* from one clan to another simultaneously and immediately clears not just individuals, but clan members, past, present and future—and heals the land.

Joseph Bush (2000) describes a dramatic ceremony of *bulubulu* at the Methodist Church Conference in 1996, in which a village of 500 people publicly atoned for the sin of a deceased grandfather who had participated in the massacre of a white plantation owner and his family in 1873. The *kalouca* (evil) the village

was experiencing on account of this past act was described as a “contagious disease”, spreading throughout the community. The presentation of a *tabua*, “a symbol of confession, deeper than words”, is the key to unlocking and freeing relations. Its very acceptance means that the sin or misdeed is immediately cleared, the words “*sereki galala!*” (freedom is loosed!) being called out. Bush, inspired by former Methodist Church President Dr Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere’s writing on the links between Fijian tradition and Christian theology (*cf.* Tuwere 2002), relates the traditional *bulubulu* to Christian notions of sin and salvation:

[*Ibulubulu* illustrates] the communal nature of sin and salvation... a rite of confession and pardon... nearly sacramental in character... *Bulubulu* literally means the “burial” of the sin that has been troubling the people... Tuwere sees all sin as having to do with relationship (*veiwekani*)... brokenness in relationship in one area is thought to reverberate throughout the whole network of relatedness. It is... “contagious”. Sin will always be manifest in broken relationship, and salvation will always find expression through well-being in the community (Bush 2000: 31-32).

“The sins of our forefathers will be punished to the third and fourth generations”

The Old Testament image of a vengeful God who punishes those who disobey him corresponds to the powers attributed to pre-Christian pagan gods and spirits in Fiji. He is seen to protect, punish and oversee all that happens in this world as well as the spirit world (Ravuvu 1983: 98). From an Old Testament perspective actions count, not only at the time they happen, but also in subsequent generations. Unless a sin has been confessed and atoned for echoes of the sin will be passed down in different forms from generation to generation.

This corresponds with traditional Fijian understandings and Pentecostal doctrine on reconciliation and forgiveness. Reverend Kacimaiwai, one of the ACCF pastors involved in counseling and spiritually preparing the villagers of Navatusila for the reconciliation ceremony, explained:

So we really need to go down to the root of it, get biblically taught on... what we have to do: corporate repentance, the chiefs and the families getting together, confessing⁴... Identifying our sins, through prayer, fasting for three weeks... until the *vanua* was ready to ask for forgiveness. Because it takes humility [to] ask [for] forgiveness, don’t you think so?... we have to remember too... they were kind of proud of doing it... Not only did they kill him... they ate him. To talk about it... it’s suddenly gone into their spirit and in their heart... we are... correcting the... past wrongs, before we... move forward. You can’t ignore this and then move forward (Kacimaiwai, interview 1/11/04).

4. See Eves 2003, Robbins 2004: 231-246, Rumsey 2008 on the importance of confession in Pentecostal faith practice in Papua New Guinea.

But why hadn't the former two *bulubulu* performed to the Methodist Church taken away the curse in Navatusila? Why, I asked Reverend Suliasi Kurulo from Christian Mission Fellowship, a leading member of the ACCF and one of the main organisers of the 2003 *bulubulu*, was it necessary to do it all again?

Because a lot of the forgiveness that had taken place was just at horizontal level, not the vertical... we helped them with the vertical, so they have to come to God... to ask forgiveness to God on behalf of their forefathers for what they [did] towards the man of God... [You] see some of the curses that we inherited... that the Bible talks about... the iniquities of our forefathers [can] visit the... third and fourth generations. [What was done] was [not done to the Methodist Church, it was] done to Thomas Baker, he was a man of God. So first of all they need to come and ask forgiveness of God (Kurulo, interview 28/9/04).

As other villages or clans, whose ancestors committed significant crimes in the past, Navatusila people experienced *kalouca* (bad luck/evil) and problems with many aspects of their daily lives:

Everything that they planted was not bearing fruit. The children were not really going ahead in education ... This is what they have analysed, regarding their family tree, and regarding the land. So that really makes them really to search. They have a time of prayer, fasting and prayer, asking forgiveness, they ask forgiveness [from] God. First of all they receive Christ into their hearts, and then they ask God's forgiveness just for them personally, and then they come as a community to ask God's forgiveness for what they have done... it was Baker and the family that was mostly affected. So we have to bring in Baker's family descendants... this was the fourth generation of the Baker family!... This is what the Bible talks about. So now... the road is [being constructed] and they [have started] to plant; things are flourishing, and they see the release in their own lives. Also they see the impact of what happened (*ibid.*⁵).

Breaking the Spiritual Stronghold

Reverend Kurulo refers in the first quote to the "horizontal level" of forgiveness, which I take to mean traditional presentations such as whale's teeth and kava roots offered during a *bulubulu*, focused on restoring the communal balance of relationship at *vanua* level. This level includes the ancestral spirits, yet also involves God, Yahweh, as creator of *vanua*. An important element of the traditional rites of *ibulubulu* or *isoro* is that the agency involved is ritually formalised between particular spokesmen (*mata ni vanua*) on behalf of the group or on behalf of the injured parties, who may be individuals. In these rituals it is the restoration of relations between two groups, rather than the restoration of relations between individuals, that is important.

5. A missing link in this article is the experience of the people themselves, but the date for the Baker reconciliation was moved so many times it became impossible for me to participate. The event finally took place when I had left the country, and I was unable subsequently to visit the area.

The Pentecostal prayers of cleansing and repentance described here are concerned with reconciliation, yet they differ from traditional Fijian rituals of reconciliation, their focus primarily being on the *vertical* level, the level of the individual's relationship with God. The main focus is on individual spiritual agency through the releasing power of the Holy Spirit.

In dedicating one's life to Christ and being baptised in the Holy Spirit one achieves a personal relationship with Christ. Steps towards this are taken through the identification of past sins, repentance, individual fasting and abstinence, and seeking God's forgiveness. It is this reconciliation with God that will affect reconciliation and the restoration of healthy moral and social relations in the community. Reverend Poate Mata, Gospel Apostolic Outreach Church, described the deterioration of relations in the area:

It went to a stage in Nataleira, if one of your relatives dies, even your own sister or your own brother wouldn't come to the funeral. That now is un-Fijian... So for us to identify the root we've got to seek God's wisdom, and God's divine intervention, because he knows we don't see the root, we see the fruits... The root is spiritual. So these people here were planting marijuana... why?... Because that's their only means of income, marijuana... according to them. But for the past ten years... the police, the village elders, they tried to encourage the people not to plant or sell or buy marijuana. They did no such thing. The police had been up there, but they could not identify [a] single marijuana [plant] in this particular village, until ACCF went in there and approached the problem from a spiritual point of view... We went and we fasted and we prayed (Mata, interview 9/11/04).

From a Pentecostal perspective there is a "spiritual stronghold" of evil binding these people to the sins of the past, causing them to commit sins in the present. The root of the problem is spiritual and can therefore only be solved through spiritual action. Each individual Christian, first and foremost, the *individual* body as vehicle for spiritual cleansing through fasting, abstinence, suffering and prayer, rather than the communal, *social* clan body as in rites of the *vanua*, is central to this. And in order to undertake this, the individual has to make a conscious, personal decision, again unlike in *vanua* rites, and has to have the will to see it through:

The only way to break through [a] spiritual strong hold [is that] you should pray and fast, or fast and pray... that has been the strategy wherever the committee on healing the land, whatever they move into then its necessary we must come together and.... the Lord shall renew their strength. So when you fast you are absconding from food, physical food and you want to feed your spirit with the spiritual food, the word of God. Okay, so you pray and you fast. You are seeking for God's intervention in your life, wisdom, strength, power, direction. You are telling God, I am going through something I can no longer handle, please I need your divine intervention, so I'll be fasting in front of you, I am sorry for all my sins, I am tormenting [my] flesh so that my spirit will grow. That's a very simple explanation of fasting... And that's what they did so they came together. It's easy... boom! Down came the power! And that saw the break-through in there (Mata, interview 9/11/04).

In November 2004, a year after the ceremony of forgiveness and reconciliation in Navatusila, the highly successful Pentecostal church Christian Mission Fellowship's monthly magazine, *The Harvest Times* (Issue 33, Nov 2004: 12) ran an article on "healing of the land" and "transformation revival" in which a number of different examples were given of communities and areas of land that had undergone divine healing and transformation, following rites of cleansing and exorcism led by pastors from the ACCF. The article explained how the people of Navatusila had experienced significant changes in the past year:

Tremendous blessing... has come down on the people of Navatusila. From stagnant, dry weather, rain falls there... the crops are in abundance... there is an abundance of fruits, root crops as well as the fish in the rivers. The skin diseases, which used to inflict the people, have disappeared and even the pigs that used to rummage and damage their crops, have disappeared. The young people after having heard that their land was cursed because of the wrong deeds of their forefathers up to the present time then realised that marijuana [which they had been growing and selling for ten years at considerable profit] was one of the causes of this curse... They then decided to pull up all the marijuana in the village... They dedicated their land and people to God and when dedication prayers were offered [there was] this sprinkling of rainfall from nowhere in heaven just to re-inforce to those who were there that God was present in the occasion (*ibid.*: 12).

The breaking of the spiritual bondage and re-infusing of the land and people with the power of the Holy Spirit affected tremendous release and change. Only through public and inner acknowledgement and confession of this bondage, as part of rites of renewal and transformation, was it possible to lift the curse of past deeds and be ritually cleansed.

In order to restore social relations and material well-being in the present it is necessary to re-interpret particular sites and acts of the past and present as demonic and destructive, demarcating and dislocating them from the present, the present understood as the time now and ahead of a person from the moment they make the decision to change and give their lives to Christ. At the same time these rituals *connect* the past with the present and in fact emphasise the ever-present power of the past in the present, just as the potential power of evil in the world is an ever-present reality.

Embodiments of Faith

John Barker (2007: 6) points out with regard to pre-Christian beliefs in Melanesia how "spiritual attacks by sorcerers, spirits, and ghosts [were attributed] to breeches of moral codes. In turn, many people interpreted the health of their bodies or success in subsistence activities as indices of the moral condition of their communities (Frankel 1986). Landscapes, rituals or decorated bodies were also read as embodiments of the moral health of a community" (O'Hanlon 1989).

This understanding is similar in Pentecostal Christianity where the body, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, is a symbol, representation and an individual and collective field of expression of faith—in ritual, as experience, spirituality and emotion. To many Pentecostals the body indicates the strength of a person's faith (*cf.* Coleman 2000: 147, 148), the strength of the *relationship* between the individual and God. The body should therefore also *be* and *be seen to be* strong, as this strength and health is in itself a witness to a person's strength of faith.

Christ himself should be portrayed as the literal embodiment of health, strength and power. Simon Coleman, analysing an illustration of Christ as a body-builder in the Word of Life charismatic church in Sweden notes that the picture shows “a healthy, strong body acting as an index of faith... a powerful and triumphalist Christ who embodies movement... the whole body... exalting in physical and spiritual power. Christ is breaking forth, perhaps even removing himself from the confines of the canvas rather than being placed in dialogue with other figures... a Christ of power who looks straight at the viewer in direct evangelical exhortation” (*ibid.*).

A Pentecostal woman explained to me the significance to Pentecostals of portraying Christ as strong and triumphant, by comparing Catholic representations of the suffering and broken Christ on the Cross. If portrayed at all, she said, the Cross should be empty, symbolising the victory and power of the resurrection:

Just as there was an empty tomb, there was an empty cross... To continue to have Christ on the cross is a sign of defeat and is idolatrous... Jesus has risen... but [they're] continuing to show a picture of weakness and suffering... If there's no resurrection, there's no Christianity... [They are preaching] a gospel of sorrow... [their] portrayal of Christ is always [like this or] as a baby (Mere Momoivalu, interview 1998).

Jesus should always be represented as and shown to be strong and victorious. It is the power of the victorious and indefatigable Risen Christ, such as Coleman's tangible Christ as a body builder, that transforms and heals individuals and communities, who through the power of his Holy Spirit exorcises ancestral spiritual power, restores morality and healthy social relations, brings rain, nourishment and healing to barren land.

Spiritual Warfare

Pastor Kanaimawi, ACCF, explains the ACCF healing of the land methodology (Newland 2006: 341-342):

They go out to a village and get all the villagers, irrespective of what church they are, look at their problems, do a spiritual mapping, map out where the devil has been influential—whether it's a killing field in one place or whether it's where they worshipped demons in the past—and then they cleanse those out. Then the people repent for what they have done and ask God to come in and the whole village just transforms.

Fer (this volume), referring to Jorgensen (2005), describes spiritual mapping as a Pentecostal theology of global spiritual warfare, developed on a worldwide-basis since the 1980s, entailing a “come-back” of territorial spirits. Jorgensen describes the categorising of development as *physical* and *spiritual* by an elderly man in Telefolip, Papua New Guinea, who argued that material development in the area had been blocked by Satan’s power, operating through traditional spirits. Only after this power had been broken could development take place (2005: 452, see also Tomlinson 2009: 148; Stritecky 2001: 66).

A cleansing of the land and exorcising of ancestral spirits was held outside the village where I lived. The Pentecostal Church of God pastor had a small and rather fluid community of adherents, mainly youth, who met for services and teaching in his home on the outskirts of the village. One night the pastor led his congregation to the top of Tavuni, the ruins of a fort on a hill behind the village. My sister told me about the all-night prayer vigil she had taken part in.

Tavuni, built by the Tongan ancestors of the villagers, was the *vanua tabu* (lit. forbidden land) of the *vanua*. There was an important message in both the pastor’s choice of location and the timing of the prayers. Although people used to collect firewood on Tavuni, it was *tabu* [taboo, forbidden] to go there after dark and on Sundays. My “father” told me how a soldier had once gone up there on a Sunday to drink, and had been chased away by the ancestral spirit that bothered him for a long time after, until he conducted the necessary rites to the clan elders, to ask forgiveness of the *vanua* and reconcile with the ancestral spirits.

But the pastor had led the group of youth up the path to the top of the Fort at the dead of night. When the group had reached its destination, my sister told me, they spent the first part of their vigil exorcising the devils around them. They called out loudly, rebuking them in the name of Jesus Christ, and the devils retreated. After this rite of exorcism and cleansing, the group spent the rest of the night on the hilltop, praying. In the morning they returned to the village.

From a Fijian socio-cultural perspective, the violation of traditional norms of respect (and fear) of ancestral sites and spirits was a strong statement against traditional values and mainstream Christian beliefs and practice. Furthermore the message is, in effect, a challenge to the political status quo, to the superiority of the power of the chiefly lineage group in the village (the pastor belonged to the commoner clan), entrenched in respect for tradition and the *vanua*, people’s belonging to the land and to the [Methodist] church.

The Fort, an excavated archaeological site, open to the public, was beautifully located with magnificent vistas of the Sigatoka river and valley, the mountainous interior of Vitilevu to the north, and the white Sigatoka sand dunes and azure of the sea to the south. I went there often to spend time alone in the shade of the ancient, gnarled trees and write my fieldwork diary. Despite its history of

fighting and cannibalism I had always felt it to be a tranquil place I enquired of my sister whether there were only evil spirits up at the Fort; were there no good spirits there? She was astounded at my question. There was no doubt in her mind—only evil spirits were there.

Conceptualising and Re-Classifying Evil

When later discussing this with Reverend Suliasi Kurulo, at that time pastor of the parachurch, Every Home for Christ, now senior pastor in Christian Mission Fellowship, he was also abundantly clear:

There are only two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness—of Satan and all his fallen angels... in the Bible these demons are called unclean spirits—and all ancestral gods [and spirits] are classified as that (Kurulo, interview 1998).

Protestant cosmological understandings that emerged during the Reformation cut out the Catholic concept of the Great Chain of Being, asserting that the only essential realities are those of God and his created world of man. There are no intermediary spirit beings between God and man in this cosmology, such as the saints and angels of Catholic belief. In Protestant cosmology God and man are related to each other by God's grace and man's faith alone (Taylor 1985: 40).

Traditional Fijian understandings of the spirit world are, by contrast, holistic. The spirits and the efficacy of the spirit world are as much a part of the concept of *vanua* as the material elements such as the rocks, rivers and trees and clans they belong to and are an integral part of people's everyday lives. Ancestral spirits are essentially neutral but can be persuaded through offerings of *yaqona* (kava) to use their *mana* for good or evil purposes. Good and evil exist within the Fijian spirit world, but are not clearly demarcated and separated, as in Christian thought. Using similar clean/unclean dichotomies as Reverend Kurulo, Pastor Ratu Meli Navuniyasi of the Pentecostal church, Apostolic Churches Fiji, explained:

Before Christianity people in Fiji had their own religions. They served these gods and devils... the old beliefs came from Eve's disobedience, [from] the First Dispensation of Innocence. The spiritual teaching of the eating of the fruit is disobedience to the teaching of the Lord. God is a clean God. If you allow sinful things in, he will pull out... [The] *vu* [ancestral spirits]... are the angels of darkness... They don't act by themselves—they only do what they are asked to do. They can provide wealth, they can heal, they can kill. You cannot see them—they manifest [themselves] through people... They are all evil (Navuniyasi, interview 26/6/98).

What is notable is that the pastors do not negate the existence or the efficacy of ancestral spirits—but they re-classify them as essentially evil forces. Many of the evangelising practices and rituals of present-day Pentecostals in Fiji, as elsewhere in the world, mirror the approach of early missionaries to the problem

of the pre-Christian spirit world. The night vigil outside the village emphasises that not only are ancestral spirits, as personifications and embodiments of tradition, redefined as concepts of evil and the devil, they are in fact necessary components of Pentecostal beliefs. As Lionel Caplan (1995: 124) points out:

Unlike liberal Christianity spread by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionaries of the principal denominations... which denied the “reality” of evil spirits in the everyday lives of their followers and potential converts, Pentecostalism not only acknowledges their existence, but continuously demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit to vanquish them.⁶

The actions of the pastor and his flock in the village not only acknowledge the existence of ancestral spirits (or devils, as they term them), they in fact *accentuate* the reality of the spirit world. “Through the image of the Devil, old spirits and deities are integrated into the Protestant universe of discourse as ‘Christian’ demons”⁷. And while the public outer battle against the demonic ancestral spirits of the land is a very real battle, while also taking place metaphysically (*cf.* Stritecky 2001), it mirrors the inner battle of individuals against the ever pervasive power of the devil and demonic spiritual forces.

Cleansing exercises involving the exorcism of demonic forces from land and community are regularly reported in the Fiji newspapers. *The Fiji Times* (4/12/02; 5/12/02; 6/12/02) brought reports of the involvement of Methodist Church members in the burning down of a family home considered to be possessed by evil spirits, the dismantling of a community hall (*soqosoqo*) and the burning of a *tanoa* (wooden kava mixing bowl) said to date from pre-Christian times in two villages in Tailevu. The purpose of these acts of cleansing was to exorcise and break demonic bonds with the past through the destruction of artifacts belonging to the past or buildings that were seen as housing spirits from a non-Christian, pagan past.

“We are trying to... cleanse ourselves spiritually”, the village headman of one of the villages commented, “and we hope to bring the village, which has been separated because of new church factions coming in, to be together again” (*Fiji Times* 4/12/02: 1). While the Methodist Church head office distanced itself from the events the “cleansing exercise was done with the support of the *vanua* and the Methodist Church” (*Fiji Times* 6/12/02: 2).

A villager whose house had been identified as possessed by evil spirits was on the other hand taking legal action. “The allegations are that there is a spirit who came from this house holding an ancient war club and spear”, he said (*Fiji Times* 5/12/02: 3). And *The Fiji Times* editorial, emphasising the value of history and historical artefacts, pointed out that “the deliberate burning of precious

6. See also Caplan 1985, 1987a, 1987b, Barker 1990, Robbins 1995. And Parkin 1985.

7. Meyer 1998: 322, see also 1992 and 1995, Newland 2004.

historical artifacts is probably illegal”. Some of the artifacts that were destroyed, such as the *tanoa*, “were made long before the Deed of Cession⁸ and as such represent a vital link with Fiji’s past” (*Fiji Times* 4/12/02: 6).

Empowering Ritual

Joel Robbins (2011) writes that Pentecostalism often claims not to be ritualised yet is actually notable for “an extremely high degree of ritual activity that marks its social life”, and Robbins points to this as the key to understanding its success. Coleman (2011) notes that charismatic ritual has the ability “to frame other kinds of replication, those of mimesis and mutual participation—rhetorical, embodied, spatial—among participants within and beyond the meeting hall”. Pentecostalism draws people together into an empowered and empowering ritualised community where change and transformation become readily attainable through individual agency.

Descendents of those who killed and cannibalised Reverend Baker had already performed two traditional ceremonies of reconciliation to the Methodist Church in Fiji in atonement, one in the early 20th Century and one in the late 20th Century, in the 1980s. Yet, according to the villagers, the curse had not been lifted and its effects—problematic relations with local government, lack of development, social problems, infertile land and bad harvests—continued to dominate their lives.

The ceremony performed in 2003, however, was markedly different from the former traditional reconciliations because Pentecostal and Methodist pastors led villagers in a period of prayer, prior to the actual ceremony. The new perspective of the 2003 reconciliation was the understanding that people could not wipe the slate clean, so to speak, by traditional rites alone. Reconciliation and healing of the land could only come about if Christian rituals of cleansing and exorcism of the land through the power of the Holy Spirit took place prior to the traditional reconciliation ceremony.

In some ways the ceremony became the culmination of a Pentecostal Christian spiritual preparatory process, rather than the main event. On the other hand, the time-consuming and costly material preparations for a ceremony of such proportions, which villagers must have spent weeks on, means that tremendous focus was placed on the ceremony itself and the complex interplay of clan relations, as well as the added power of the attendance of the highest ranking government and church leaders in the country and overseas guests. However, the unusual addition of a preparatory period of praying and fasting before a traditional reconciliation ceremony, and the ways in which the event was explained from Pentecostal perspectives, is significant.

8. 1874—when Fijian chiefs ceded Fiji to Britain.

The “healing of the land” conducted prior to the Baker reconciliation held tremendous transformative and empowering potential in the fact that pastors from Suva came especially to a neglected, rural area and stayed for a prolonged period to work with the villagers and guide them through a programme of ritual spiritual reconciliatory interaction. The serious attention bestowed on the people of this area and the ritualised opportunities individuals were given to act, to take charge of their life and make a conscious, personal decision to change, is unusual and empowering in relation to the highly hierarchical norms of traditional rural Fiji society.

Conclusion: Redefining Christianity and Tradition

It is in many ways extraordinary that Pentecostal pastors officially took part in a traditional ceremony involving rituals that link people to their ancestral forefathers and spirits. In seeking an explanation for this it is useful, I think, to look at the ways in which Pentecostals in Fiji continually seek to differentiate and negotiate between their faith as Born Again Christians and their identity as Fijians.

The Three Pillars construct of *vanua* (tradition) *lotu* (church/Christian faith) and *matanitu* (government/state) is constantly referred to as an interwoven construct, though most people focus on the strong interweavings between the first two elements, tradition and church/faith. This is, as previously mentioned, a particularly Methodist perspective.

Pentecostal Pastor Ratu Meli Navuniyasi, formerly a Methodist, makes a distinction between what he considers sacred and profane elements of the construct, saying that *lotu* (faith, spirituality, the church) is divine and must be considered separately and held apart from the worldly categories of *vanua* and *matanitu*.

The concept of *vanua* is very broad and very deep. When you come to understand the revelation of the Lord [you understand that] the land (*vanua*) and *matanitu* are together... [but] this *lotu* is a heavenly matter, it's spiritual. *Vanua* and *matanitu*... are of the world. [Jesus said] *noqu matanitu e vaka lomalagi*—my kingdom is not of this world [lit. my kingdom is in Heaven]... Man consists of body, soul, and spirit. Body and soul are well fitted into this government [*matanitu*] and *vanua*—the spirit never (Navuniyasi, interview 12/6/98).

There are two salient points in this representation of the relations between Christianity and tradition. One is that the Three Pillar construct is redefined as a triangular relationship, with *lotu* as the apex, *vanua* and *matanitu* as the base. The second salient point is the words “*when you come to understand the revelation of the Lord*”. Methodists generally see a Fijian's interwoven sense of faith and belonging to *vanua* as innate, God-given qualities of *Fijianness*.

In contrast, Pastor Navuniyasi's point is that understanding the revelation of the Lord is not an inherent characteristic, but the result of a *process* of recognition and understanding. The Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit, leads the believer through a process of transformation to a point where he *reveals* a deeper understanding of *vanua*, *lotu* and *matanitu* which at a personal spiritual level indisputably sets the spiritual apart from the worldly. This indicates that such revelation is *acquired* knowledge, based on spiritual maturity: "When you are spiritually matured... the spirit will urge you to do [his work]" (Navuniyasi, interview 5/6/98).

I suggest that having first, in the weeks prior to the ceremony, exorcised the land of its ancestral spiritual power and demonstrated the superior power of Christianity through the power of the Holy Spirit in social relations and reconciling people and the land, the presence of the pastors within the ceremony could be seen as a form of spiritual warfare—against the presence of ancestral spiritual powers in the traditional ceremony.

The presence of the pastors could also be seen as part of a general strategy of translating *vanua* values and practices to become based on biblical and Pentecostal Christian principles—of rearranging the Three Pillar construct in the way Ratu Meli Navuniyasi explains, with (Pentecostal) Christianity at the apex.

And finally, since the ACCF advocates that Fiji be declared a Christian state, entailing the strengthening of a particular Protestant version of Christianity in Fiji that supports the strengthening of chiefly power, the ACCF's organising of the reconciliation ceremony and their official presence could also be seen as a political statement.

Whatever the motives of the pastors and the ACCF the event as a whole reflects the continuous historical intertwining of Christianity and tradition in Fiji in terms of faith and beliefs, ritual, performance and politics. It highlights the dynamic ways Pentecostal ritual can be transposed to any setting—even, paradoxically, as a prelude to a traditional ceremony Pentecostals would usually eschew. And it underscores the successful ways in which Pentecostals in Fiji redefine Christianity and tradition within the framework of their faith, spirituality and theology.

The rituals of healing and transformation conducted prior to the Baker reconciliation did not seek to sever people from their ties to the land and their traditions, but rather to assert the superior power of the Holy Spirit through exorcising and vanquishing ancestral spiritual power and redirecting the importance and thereby power of tradition in people's lives to be defined within a Pentecostal Christian spiritual and theological framework.

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Burying the Past—Healing the Land: Ritualising Reconciliation in Fiji

This article discusses a high-profile traditional reconciliation ceremony staged in Fiji in November 2003. It describes how human agency is reflected in the state of the land and in people's social relations, past and present; how human agency is seen to spiritually disturb or reconcile the land, its innate ancestral powers and their influence on people's relations and the land; and how the efficacy of ancestral spirituality of the land may affect change, punishing or rewarding people's actions. And it discusses how the power of the Holy Spirit can bring about change through exorcising the land of ancestral spiritual power and un-blocking what Pentecostal Christians describe as demonic spiritual strongholds.

Key words: reconciliation, ritual, tradition, land, Christianity.

Enterrer le passé – Guérir la terre : la ritualisation de la réconciliation à Fidji

Cet article traite d'une cérémonie traditionnelle très médiatisée qui a eu lieu à Fidji en novembre 2003. Il décrit la manière dont l'action des hommes se reflète dans l'état de la terre et dans les relations sociales, passées et présentes ; comment l'action des hommes est perçue comme un élément spirituel de perturbation ou de réconciliation entre la terre, ses pouvoirs ancestraux et leur influence sur les relations entre le peuple et la terre ; et comment les forces spirituelles ancestrales de la terre peuvent agir sur le cours des événements, en punissant ou en récompensant les actions des personnes. Enfin, il traite de la manière dont le pouvoir du Saint-Esprit peut apporter un changement en exorcisant de la terre son pouvoir ancestral et en éliminant ce que les pentecôtistes décrivent comme des bastions des puissances démoniaques.

Mots-clés : réconciliation, rituel, tradition, terre, christianisme.

Enterrar el pasado, curar la tierra: la ritualización de la reconciliación en Fidji

Este artículo trabaja una ceremonia tradicional muy mediatizada que tuvo lugar en Fidji en noviembre de 2003. Describe la manera en que la acción de los hombres se refleja en el estado de la tierra y en las relaciones sociales, pasadas y presentes; cómo la agencia humana es percibida como un elemento espiritual de perturbación o de reconciliación entre la tierra, sus poderes ancestrales y su influencia en las relaciones entre el pueblo y la tierra; y cómo las fuerzas espirituales ancestrales de la tierra pueden actuar sobre el curso de los acontecimientos, castigando o recompensando las acciones de las personas. Finalmente, trata de la manera en que el poder del Espíritu Santo puede aportar un cambio, exorcizando el poder ancestral de la tierra y eliminando aquello que los Pentecostales describen como bastiones de los poderes demoníacos.

Palabras clave: reconciliación, ritual, tradición, tierra, cristianismo.