

*Indigenous Knowledge and Empowerment:
Rural Development Examined from Within*

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From Foucault (1980, 1988) to Amin (1976, 1989), and from Freire (1970, 1984) to Nyerere and others (1990), a strong argument has been made that development dictated from the outside rather than anchored in the knowledge base of the target population is in principle modernization disguised: it will not be fully concerned with local needs. While it is true that globalizing forces may be realized in uniquely local forms (Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997; Wilson and Dissanayake 1996; Keesing 1992), it is also true that western-oriented development in third world countries has been haunted by its own ghost, underdevelopment. This is evidenced by the continuing marginalization of already marginalized populations in Latin America and elsewhere (Grugel 1995; Afshar 1996), and the unsustainable harvesting of forest and other resources by transnational corporations in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (Thistlethwaite and Davis 1996; Roughan 1997; Frazer 1997).

The argument that development responsive to the needs of third world people should come from within their own communities is not new. The approaches so far taken to realize this goal, however, while they involve the participation of target populations, still continue to be based on western development models. Only recently have researchers and scholars begun arguing that indigenous and local knowledge should constitute the core of development models in the third world (see, for example, Brokensha, Warren, and Werner 1980; Hobart 1993; Brush and Stabinsky 1996; Dudley 1993; Burkey 1993; Long and Long 1992).

In this paper I examine what development anchored in indigenous knowledge—and especially in indigenous epistemology—should entail, as seen from the perspective of an indigenous Pacific Islander. In doing so, I

examine the particular case of rural development as experienced by West Kwara'ae villagers of Malaita in the Solomon Islands.

Data for this paper come from my ongoing research in West Kwara'ae over the past twenty years, including one hundred and fifty intensive interviews conducted in 1990, 1992, and 1994 with Kwara'ae men and women across three generations on their development perspectives and experiences. The data are supplemented by my indigenous knowledge of Kwara'ae culture and personal experiences growing up in a rural village affected by development from the time of its introduction by the colonial government in the 1950s. Data analysis is guided by radical political economy (Munck 1984; Sherman 1987), with a little help from social epistemology (Fuller 1988; Goldman 1986).

INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGY AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

My choice of the term *epistemology* is not lightly made. In adopting and modifying practices and knowledge from the outside, Kwara'ae people theorize about rural development and integrate traditional knowledge with introduced knowledge, thereby creating a new form of knowledge I am calling *indigenous knowledge*. Theorizing about creating truth, establishing facts or knowledge that become truth, and ways of creating knowledge are all aspects of epistemology. Indigenous epistemology refers to a cultural group's ways of thinking and of creating and reformulating knowledge using traditional discourses and media of communication (eg, face-to-face interaction) and anchoring the truth of the discourse in culture (*kastom* in Solomon Islands Pijin, *falafala* in Kwara'ae; Gegeo 1994; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo nd). Indigenous epistemology guides the social construction of indigenous knowledge, and indigenous knowledge is the result of the practice of indigenous epistemology.

Typically, when development scholars and researchers argue for the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into rural development discourse and practice, they are talking about already existing indigenous knowledge, usually of a technical type (eg, technical knowledge from traditional agriculture or fishing). I argue that the process of incorporating indigenous knowledge into rural development discourse and practice must also include how a group theorizes about creating new knowledge. After all, rural development does not simply mean rural villagers learning introduced techniques for raising fatter pigs, or new technical skills of how to

fit pipes together in a water system. More profoundly, rural development involves learning and adapting introduced and new locally created knowledge toward positive change that supports life and affects villagers' world-views and systems of knowing, understanding, and reasoning.

Indigenous epistemology is important because rural development should and inevitably will experience a transformation every time it enters a new cultural milieu. If the principal goal of rural development is to serve local needs, the transformation must be encouraged to occur. By speaking of "change" and "transformation" here I am not implying that there is something about rural third world peoples that needs to be "fixed," in the way that classic modernization theory argues that third world peoples "must break free of 'traditional' institutional structures" (Tollefson 1991, 82) to embrace western values and social formations. The change that I mean is that which villagers themselves bring about. It may involve borrowing from outside knowledge or ideas, but in a very essential way it emerges from their own perspectives, cultures, and languages. Such changes are parallel to a village man who collects imported manufactured building materials for a permanent (iron roof, composite walls) house, but the choice of location of the house and its design and construction are his and his family's own, tailored to provide the comfort and sense of confidence, dignity, and rootedness the family requires. The house of non-traditional materials thus provides for that family the tradition-based sense and experience of *gwaumauri'anga* (the "good life"; discussed fully later), which underlies the philosophy of rural development in Kwara'ae from a Kwara'ae perspective.

THE KWARA'AE: DISCOURSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

A Melanesian people, the Kwara'ae number more than twenty thousand, making them the largest cultural and linguistic group in the Solomon Islands. Despite heightening participation in interisland circular migration over the past few decades for purposes of wage labor (Chapman 1992, 1987, 1976), the majority still live in rural villages in north Malaita on traditionally held land. My research focuses on the coastal plain of West Kwara'ae, where population density is high and arable land is limited. A major site of large government- and church-sponsored development projects since World War II, West Kwara'ae is also the location of Auki, the colonial government's district seat from 1906 until national indepen-

dence in 1978, and today the administrative headquarters and main business center of Malaita Province.

The colonial history of Malaita has been documented by several researchers (eg, Hogbin 1969; Hilliard 1978; Keesing and Corris 1980; Laracy 1983; Fox 1985; Keesing 1992; Akin 1993; Gegeo 1994; Boggs and Gegeo 1996; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 1996). Both during the colonial period and since, the Kwara'ae have been attracted to and repulsed by white outsiders, what they offer, and their cultural practices. The Kwara'ae have valued and desired access to European and Asian technology, material goods, cash (required for purchases but also to pay taxes, school fees, and the like), and education. But accompanying the availability of these benefits were outsiders' racism toward and mistreatment of Melanesians. Increasingly since the turn of the century West Kwara'ae people have come to distrust outsiders. Not surprisingly, West Kwara'ae were heavily involved in the post-World War II Maasina Rule movement that helped pave the way for self-government and independence in the Solomon Islands (Worsley 1968; Laracy 1983).

Although rural villagers continue the indigenous mode of production—subsistence agriculture supplemented by fishing and gathering activities—today there is a growing concern among West Kwara'ae that their lives are increasingly dependent on the global mode of production (factory-made foods and other goods imported from overseas) rather than on their own skills to provide for themselves. In their view, the most critical change brought by colonialism was that their lives changed from *tua lali-fu'anga* 'living in rootedness' and *tua 'inoto'a'anga* 'living in dignity', to *tua malafaka'anga* 'living in imitation of life brought by the ships', or pseudo-westernization. Both old and young speak of their concern that what remains of the indigenous mode of production is in serious danger of being displaced and replaced by *tua'a 'ani mani* or *fanga'a 'ani mani* 'capitalism' (literally, "life [determined by] money" or "eating [ie, consumption] with money").

These views are not those of naive villagers romanticizing their culture or glorifying a mythical past. The West Kwara'ae recognize that both as a people and as individuals, they struggle between two opposing discourses (in Foucault's sense) of traditional culture (*falafala* or *kastom*) and modernization. They recognize the constantly changing nature of culture, and the multiplicity of values, perspectives, and ways of doing and being within their own culture and society. Their recognition of these points is

reflected in how they use the term *culture*. *Falafala* refers to the widely shared cultural practices and values in Kwara'ae ("our *falafala*"), much of which is sacred and traditional. *Falafala* is also used to refer to variation within this shared culture, that is, differing values, perspectives, preferences, and behaviors that vary with individuals, villages, or districts within Kwara'ae ("his or her *falafala*," "that village's *falafala*"), as well as the practices and beliefs of other cultural groups ("British *falafala*"). The term *falafala* also includes the notion that culture is always changing (*falafala rokisi'anga* 'the process of cultural change') and differs from one generation to another. West Kwara'ae make a three-way distinction among ancient or traditional culture (*falafala 'ua'ua* or *na'ona'o*), culture as changing from generation to generation (*falafala rokisi*), and culture as introduced or imposed from the outside through westernization and modernization (*falafala faolo* or *fi'i dao* 'newly arrived culture').

Villagers recognize that three general perspectives on culture and change exist within the Kwara'ae population. Rural villagers who support themselves primarily by subsistence agriculture make up the majority—and such villagers constitute 85 percent of the population in the Solomons today. Among villagers there is a continuum of approaches to and perspectives on modernization and rural development (Gegeo 1994 identified eight such perspectives). Nevertheless, villagers are the most culturally conservative and are seen as *to'a daua tua'a* or *falafala* 'people who uphold culture' and are *bibi ana falafala* 'the weight [foundation] of culture'. A much smaller group are low-paid employees in the public and private sectors (clerks, teachers, casual laborers, and so on), usually residing for periods in urban or peri-urban areas. The smallest group are salaried government and private sector workers who live primarily in urban areas. The last two groups are the most attracted to Anglo-European lifestyles, yet typically on retirement they (and their equivalents in other Solomon Islands cultures) return to the village—in the Kwara'ae case, on Malaita—and attempt to regain what they say is their true identity, to become traditional again and participate in traditional practices (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo nd; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1991). Chapman (1992, 1987, 1976) and others who have noticed this pattern of interisland mobility call it circular migration.

Circular migration underlines what the Kwara'ae say about "living in imitation of life brought by the ships" as being, for them, a pseudo life. For all its attractions, living a modernized, Anglo-European-influenced

life is seen as a stage of experience, something one does either before marriage or, if as a career, until retirement. In either case, the Anglo-European lifestyle is described as *tua'a sasala* or *matamata* 'lightweight or different life [culture]', even by those Kwara'ae who are the most educated, acculturated, and successful at it. One's life is unfinished until one completes the cycle by returning to clan-held land, the village, and one's true foundation in *falafala*. Thus, for instance, dying in Honiara (the capital) or while still employed in wage labor is not seen as dying in *'inoto'a 'anga* 'dignity'. It is called *mae'a ana faka* 'dying in the state of pseudo-westernization'. At the least, one's body will be taken back to one's Malaita village to be buried. Kwara'ae people living in Honiara, even those born there, speak of returning "to the house (*luma*)," when referring to where they are currently living. "Going home (*fanoa*)," on the other hand, refers exclusively to one's village, even for those who were not born on Malaita; they still have land rights and a village identity through their patrilineal or matrilineal kin, or both. These contrasting attitudes toward an Anglo-European style versus a tradition-based style of living reflect the alienation that many experience on a daily basis, despite their attraction to some aspects of modernization. Kwara'ae interviewees spoke of feeling vulnerable to social forces they could not control in town, where paid laborers are disposable, acquiring necessities (food, shelter) depends on cash income, and family supports are few. They spoke of how returning to the village brings feelings of freedom, of being truly themselves, and of ending the suppression of their identity necessitated by living away from the village.

One of the key cultural events that returnees to the village need to be able to participate in is the critical group discussions through which Kwara'ae culture and philosophy are rethought and renewed. The Kwara'ae value and regularly practice their tradition of "critical discussion" or "enlightened dialogue" (*talingisilana ala'anga*) in high rhetoric (*ala'anga lalifu*), the formal and semantically complex register of the language used on all important occasions and for discussions of all significant sociocultural and political topics. High rhetoric includes a large, rich lexicon of abstract terms with subtle distinctions for discussing concepts of person, social behavior, the natural world, and society. "Critical discussion" takes place in small group, village, and area gatherings to explore and decide on important issues, facilitating the rethinking of culture and the continuing development of the Kwara'ae language. The forms of argu-

mentation and reasoning used in this Kwara'ae indigenous epistemological practice are named, and are taught to children in teaching sessions at home.

Continual renewal is part of the metaphorical understanding that *fala-fala* is a *ru mauri*, 'living thing', and *te'a mauri kia* 'our living mother'. A person is regarded as "alive" not merely as a function of biology, but when living according to cultural norms (*mauri'a saga* 'living straight'). Thus *falafala* becomes the social force that *kwa'ia tala* 'cuts the path' on which one walks in life. When passing verdicts in court cases or dispute-settlement meetings, Kwara'ae *kastom* judges and village chiefs routinely begin with the cultural pronouncement, "We human beings who are alive should not behave in ways that bring us here." The implication is that no Kwara'ae walking the path set by culture should err in ways requiring the expertise of judges or other elders to set right.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMES TO KWARA'AE: AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

Modernization in its various manifestations (Christianity, colonization, transnational corporatism, capitalist transformation, and so forth) has been a dominant social force in the Solomon Islands since the 1800s (Hogbin 1969; Fox 1958; Bennett 1987; Gegeo 1994). However, only since the 1950s have Solomon Islanders experienced rural development as a global phenomenon. Within this short period, rural development has escalated from a vaguely understood concept to the dominant social force in the islands.

The intensity with which rural development has taken command of life in Kwara'ae is metaphorically referred to by Kwara'ae villagers as *gwata kwasi* 'like a wild pig', *akalo faolo* 'a new kind of spirit', or *akalo ngwae kwao* 'the white man's devil'. These metaphors express the way in which Kwara'ae villagers say they are intoxicated (*lilinga*) by rural development such that they often behave in ways they never would under normal (cultural) circumstances. For example, landowners are often talked into selling their forests and other land resources to transnational corporations for prices well below what their resources actually are worth, in the hope of quickly becoming rich.

When rural development was first introduced, the Solomon Islands was still under British colonial rule. At that time the views of Solomon

Islanders (even when requested) on any matter of national importance, including national policies, were rarely given any degree of consideration by the expatriate colonial hierarchy. The situation was greatly exacerbated by the very small number of Solomon Islanders who held important positions in the colonial government, a fact that directly reflected education under the colonial government as being concerned not so much with preparing Solomon Islanders for leadership roles as with promoting the interests of the existing colonial hierarchy.

In the 1950s and 1960s, decision makers in rural development were expatriates who made policies and designed projects. Solomon Islanders participated as laborers, consumers, and observers of the services provided through the projects. Rural development was promoted not in response to the needs of the villagers, but according to what expatriate colonial leaders presumed was best for the Solomon Islands under a model applied elsewhere in the British empire (Asia, Africa, the Caribbean). The aim was to make colonies self-sufficient, with profits remanded to the colonial state, which retained political control. Devoid of input by Solomon Islanders, especially villagers, rural development policies and projects inevitably were Anglo-European in taste and philosophy, as was illustrated by a number of agricultural projects undertaken by the colonial government in West Kwara'ae. The projects closely resembled farms in New Zealand, Australia, and England, in design as well as the varieties of animals and crops raised. Even for the culturally naive, the projects raised the question of how relevant they were to the needs of the villagers.

West Kwara'ae villagers, on passing demonstration projects on their way somewhere else, often commented on them as being *ru ana ta kula* 'a thing from somewhere else', or *ru fi'i dao* 'a newly arrived thing', or *sau-nga'i'anga faolo* 'a new creation'. The comments imply the cultural and environmental incongruence—that is, the deforming nature—of the projects. The comments also imply the powerlessness, helplessness, and alienation that Kwara'ae villagers felt every time the colonial government introduced some new change into Kwara'ae, supposedly to improve life in the villages, but, ironically, always excluding villagers from the decision-making process. Moreover, the colonial government would suddenly abandon projects that it considered on the verge of failure, often without any explanation, leaving villagers to handle any negative environmental consequences (eg, 'Asai Farm; see Gegeo 1994 and later).

Village-owned projects begun with government advice and encourage-

ment (eg, Kuarafi Farm; see Gegeo 1994) were also seen by other villagers as *ru ana ta kula* ‘culturally out of place’. A more derogatory expression used was that the Kwara‘ae who owned the projects only *liakwaimausuli* ‘imitate’ Westerners. The word *liakwaimausuli* bears a far more negative connotation than the English word *imitate* and is a major cultural insult. In traditional belief, anything done as *liakwaimausuli‘anga* ‘imitation’ of something else rather than *talasau* or *talafuli ana ngwae* ‘having its source in the doer’, is *‘iri lalifu*, that is, “lacks root and dignity,” and is destined to fail. Many projects essentially became amusement parks instead of sources of learning for West Kwara‘ae villagers; teenagers, especially, frequented them on weekends and other holidays for recreational purposes.

‘Asai Demonstration Farm, set up in Fiu district in the early 1960s, was such a project. When the farm was dissolved in the mid-1970s by its government managers, local Kwara‘ae villagers felt regret, partly because for a period of more than ten years, it had been for them a *kula ni liliu‘anga*, a “place to wander about in search of entertainment and recreation” (see Gegeo 1994). They also felt regret because of the severe ecological damage the farm caused to the local area, serious repercussions from which continue today (Gegeo 1994). However, nobody expressed the notion of missing the farm as an important source of knowledge or income. In a culture in which, for most people, learning occurs through observation and practical involvement, this is serious and speaks loudly of how unconnected villagers were to the farm.

From a development theory perspective, the colonial government’s employment of the term *rural development* for its projects was a misnomer. In development theory, rural development is a “‘process of growth . . . springing from within’ in rural society that involves a ‘growing’ individual and collective self-reliance, and focuses not only on material and economic needs, but also on emotional, ethical, and political empowerment” (Gegeo 1994, 12, partly quoting Nyerere and others 1990, 10). But change had not been guided by indigenous knowledge and pedagogy. In light of the top-down or center-periphery unilinear change, the projects initiated by the colonial government can be more correctly described as *deconcentration* rather than rural development (de Soto 1989).

The colonial government’s errors haunted nearly all the projects in West Kwara‘ae to extinction (see Gegeo 1994). Today the only projects started under the rubric of rural development in the 1960s that still exist are the small airport at Gwaunaru‘u, Kiluufi Hospital, the agricultural

experimental station at Dala, and the Malaita road. Of these four projects, the Malaita road and Kiluufi Hospital are the only two still actively serving the needs of local villagers. Although Dala Experimental Station was started to “modernize” agricultural production, during interviews in 1990 West Kwara‘ae villagers said with some seriousness that if they had to wait for agricultural officials at Dala to show them new techniques of planting sweet potato, taro, coconut, and the like, there would be no Kwara‘ae person alive today—they would all have died from malnutrition and mass starvation! During the forty years of its existence, Dala Experimental Station has contributed very little to villagers in the way of agricultural knowledge. Rather, because their experiments are on overseas agricultural crops that don’t thrive in Malaita soils and climates, the station continues to illustrate the irrelevance of rural development based on the modernization model of the 1950s.

While the errors made by the colonial government were serious enough, a more critical mistake was assuming that West Kwara‘ae villagers valued traditional ways of doing things not from choice but rather because they did not have the notion of development. The colonial government, therefore, saw it as its moral duty to “civilize the natives” by introducing development to them.

The Kwara‘ae *do* have a notion of development in their repertoire of indigenous concepts, one that guides their practice. But the concept itself and the practices it guides are different from what “development” implies in Anglo-European societies.

GWAUMAURI‘ANGA: THE PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVE OF KWARA‘AE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The traditional Kwara‘ae perspective on the good life is firmly anchored in the nine key cultural values of Kwara‘ae society: *alafe‘anga* ‘kin love, kindness’, *aroaro‘anga* ‘peace, peacefulness’, *babato‘o‘anga* ‘stability’, *enoeno‘anga* ‘humility’, *fangale‘a‘anga* ‘sharing’, *kwaigwale‘e‘anga* ‘welcoming, comforting, hospitality’, *kwaima‘anga* ‘love, kindness, eros’, *kwaisare‘e‘anga* ‘giving without expectation of return’, and *mamana‘anga* ‘truth, honesty, sacred power’ (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986). These values together constitute *gwaumauri‘anga*, which is seen by the Kwara‘ae as the essence of the “good life” (*mauri‘a le‘a*). From an indigenous perspective, *gwaumauri‘anga* is the principal objective of rural development.

As a philosophy, *gwaumauri'anga* embraces the notion of “the state of being at the head or pinnacle of life.” More specifically, it refers to the ideal state of *ali'afu'anga* ‘total completeness’, where *mauri'a* ‘life’ and *mauri'anga* ‘the process of living’ transcend death, leading to a condition of being where only positive experiences—happiness, love, peace, security, plenitude—exist for humans. Of course no one lives the ideal or expects to do so, but *gwaumauri'anga* is the ultimate life goal and is frequently evoked in a variety of ways in conversation.

To achieve *gwaumauri'anga*, the Kwara'ae say that three fundamental human needs must be met at the individual and collective levels. Referred to in the philosophy of *gwaumauri'anga* as a “triad of human needs,” these are spiritual, psychological, and physical needs.¹ So fundamental are these needs that failure is said to be inevitable if all three are not part of rural development planning and policy implementation. Implied in this view is the fact that, while the Kwara'ae philosophy of *gwaumauri'anga* may have certain transcultural humanistic characteristics, the Kwara'ae believe that *only* indigenous knowledge is *fully* responsive to the triad of human needs.

Why is *gwaumauri'anga* so fundamental in Kwara'ae society? The Kwara'ae argue that a person who achieves the state of *gwaumauri'anga* is a *ngwae ali'afu* ‘a complete person’ and a *ngwae lalifu* ‘a rooted person’. A person who has achieved the state of *ali'afu'anga* ‘completeness’ and *lalifu'anga* ‘rootedness’ is said to live in or embrace the Kwara'ae nine key cultural values mentioned. Such a person shows *fu'usi'imoto'a'anga* ‘respect’, is *fu'usi'imoto'oa* ‘respected’ by others, and is said to live in *manata fauto'o'anga* ‘contentment’. In principle, then, a *gwaumauri* person is someone who is the ultimate Kwara'ae *gwaunga'i* ‘important, respected, dignified, revered person or elder’ who has achieved *gwaunga'i'anga* ‘headness’.

Although critically important as the essence of the good life, *gwaumauri'anga* does not automatically lead to the achievement of *gwaunga'i'anga*. For example, a person who lives in *gwaumauri'anga* simply as the result of material possession (eg, a business owner or politician) may be admired and respected but may not be considered *gwaunga'i* unless genuinely engaged in culturally appropriate activities and living a humanitarian life. The Kwara'ae say that true *gwaunga'i'anga* is that which *sau ma'i saena ru'uru'u'i ngwae* ‘has its source in the heart’.

This brief outline merely sketches some of the cultural complexity in

Kwara'ae conceptions of development (see Gegeo 1994). The state of life represented by *gwaumauri'anga* and *gwaunga'i'anga* constitutes the principal goals for which the Kwara'ae aim in most things they do from the time they become adults. Against the background of the philosophy of *gwaumauri'anga*, it is clear, then, why rural development based on the modernization model is alienating and problematic for West Kwara'ae villagers. The kind of life aimed for through rural development cum modernization, with its strong emphasis on western values, knowledge, cash accumulation, and consumption, together with a much greater general stress on economic goals over social or cultural goals, is incongruent with the life represented in the philosophy of *gwaumauri'anga* and *gwaunga'i'anga*. In fact, West Kwara'ae villagers say that the colonial and current government's approach to rural development has been *lia'a ta'i bali* 'a one-sided vision', rather than *dau'afu* 'holistic', and argue that the resulting failure of development projects was inevitable.

In the next section I discuss two discourses viewed by West Kwara'ae villagers as fundamental to the way rural development is practised in West Kwara'ae in relation to the philosophy of *gwaumauri'anga*. These are the discourses of *diflopmen* 'development' and *bisnis* 'business' (together with *diflopmen'anga* 'developing' and *bisnis'anga* 'engaging in business'—these terms focusing on the active participation of people).

DIFLOPMEN'ANGA AND BISNIS'ANGA: TWO DISCOURSES IN KWARA'AE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

As concept and practice, *bisnis* has been part of the *tua malafaka'anga* 'pseudo-westernization' discourse in Kwara'ae since the early 1900s. *Diflopmen*, on the other hand, became part of the discourse only in the 1960s and 1970s. However, while new as a word, as concept and practice *diflopmen* has always been part of Kwara'ae culture. This fact was substantiated during interviews in 1990 when Kwara'ae villagers offered more than thirty words—all of them old terms in high rhetoric—that embrace the concept and practice of *diflopmen* (see Gegeo 1994).

For the West Kwara'ae, rural development that aims to promote life firmly anchored in the principles of *gwaumauri'anga* must be grounded in a clear understanding of the concepts *diflopmen* and *bisnis*. The Kwara'ae concepts share semantic and epistemological links with the English concepts *development* and *business*, from which they were derived. However,

the two concepts also embrace perspectives that are strikingly different from each other and from the English concepts. The Kwara'ae say that for them *diflopmen* and *bisnis* are not the same thing, although in informal discourse they often use the two terms interchangeably. Moreover, some find engaging in *diflopmen* and *bisnis* simultaneously to be beneficial, and others alternate between the two from year to year.

More specifically, to the West Kwara'ae *bisnis* is seen largely as a negative activity in which one can engage, but only *madafia* 'with caution', whereas *diflopmen* is seen as positive.

Bisnis

Bisnis is regarded as negative for four reasons. First, *bisnis* is seen as a "dead" or "inactive" mode of production (*ru mae*, literally, "thing die or dead"). Second, *bisnis* is seen as concerned only with material possessions: *todamani'anga* 'possessing in a selfish, accumulating way'. Third, *bisnis* is negative because most kinds of projects introduced under its rubric lead to nothing meaningful in the end. Fourth, *bisnis* is negative in that it is regarded as external to oneself; it does not emerge from one's own hands.

The view of *bisnis* as a "dead" mode of production derives from villagers' experiences with business activities introduced under the colonial government. As mentioned earlier, in ignoring indigenous knowledge, the colonial government set up economic projects and businesses that both required the learning of new skills and ignored the skills villagers already had. Villagers who participated in projects came to feel de-skilled, since their roles were subservient manual labor. People lost their feeling of self-confidence and dignity, and felt stripped of their adulthood. These feelings fed into the colonial attitude that Islanders were ignorant, lazy, and childish. In interviews, West Kwara'ae villagers argued that these early experiences with business might not have been so negative had the colonial government provided ways through which skills necessary to succeed in the introduced projects could have been learned.

The colonial assumption was that villagers would learn necessary skills from practice. This assumption was probably based on the traditional way of acquiring knowledge through practice in Kwara'ae. However, in traditional Kwara'ae culture learning through practice requires full participation at all levels of the task or activity. With their participation in business activities restricted largely to the subservient role of primary

labor, West Kwara'ae villagers became very skilled at performing menial tasks. Their participation, however, included very few opportunities to acquire necessary managerial skills through practice.

Nevertheless, West Kwara'ae villagers started small businesses with great enthusiasm during the colonial and early postcolonial periods, even though nearly all of those businesses failed, for a variety of reasons (detailed in Gegeo 1994). The high failure rate has led Kwara'ae villagers to develop a fatalistic attitude toward business and to regard *bisnis* as a "dead" mode of operation. This is indicated in commonly used expressions such as: *ngwae 'oro ilia bisnis* 'many people have tried bisnis', implying that they have all failed; *bisnis ru baera* 'bisnis has a history of its own', implying that, as experienced by the Kwara'ae, *bisnis* has produced nothing but negative results, and so on.

The second way in which West Kwara'ae villagers view *bisnis* as "dead" or "inactive" has to do with the concept of *laliru'anga* 'chasing things'. In the rural development literature, *diversification* refers to producing several different kinds of commodities so as to prevent the national economy from a serious dip or fall during a recession (Johnston and Clark 1982). In Kwara'ae, the term for diversification is *o'odolado-la'anga*, from the notion of mixed cropping in gardening. In the Solomons, the government and transnational corporations introduced and promoted several kinds of businesses at once with the intention of diversifying the economy. However, initially lacking the requisite knowledge and skills for many of these introduced businesses, West Kwara'ae villagers felt bombarded and unsure of which businesses to choose. Furthermore, often the government and transnational corporations introduced businesses for which there were no resources in West Kwara'ae to render them sustainable. For the Kwara'ae, diversification became *laliru'anga*, that is, chasing every new business that was introduced, but always ending up with nothing meaningful.

Laliru'anga is clearly demonstrated by the experience that villagers go through every couple of years or so in which they lose their rural development projects to failure and are then caught up by new projects introduced from the peri-urban and urban centers. For example, it is common to go to West Kwara'ae (and the same holds true in other regions as well) one year and find everybody actively engaged in running small bakeries. It is not unusual to find that in a village of less than one hundred villagers there may be two or three small bakeries in full operation. In the next vil-

lage, which has perhaps the same number of persons, there may be four small bakeries in operation. Clearly, there is not enough market demand in poor villages to sustain so many bakeries. Returning to the same area a year or so later, therefore, one is likely to find that all the bakeries have collapsed and been abandoned to a new wave of businesses operating in their place, say, trade stores. Two years later, it may be cattle projects. And two years after that, poultry or piggeries. The pattern is so pervasive and so predictable that, as the year draws to a close, villagers agonize over how to keep their businesses from being swept away by failure and the new wave of businesses that the new year will usher in.

Laliru'anga is such a serious problem that the villagers have developed a discourse for it. Part of the discourse is that every year is referred to or characterized by the kinds of projects in operation. Accordingly, 1997, for example, may be referred to as the “year of bakeries” (*fa'i ngali bekari*), or the “year of pigs” (*fa'i ngali gwata*), and so forth. National election years, too, are referred to or characterized in this way. The term used is *fa'i ngali kandidat'anga* ‘year of candidacy’ or “year of candidate-ing.”

National elections have become part of the discourse of *laliru'anga* because those holding public office as members of the national parliament or provincial assemblies use their salaries to fund development projects such as trade stores, house rentals, cattle, piggeries, and so on. Holding a seat in either the national parliament or the Malaita provincial assembly is part of the discourse of *laliru'anga* because it is terminal. In order to retain the seat the incumbent must campaign hard in the elections, which are held every four years. Nearly every candidate is defeated after one term, being unable to make much difference for the district where elected. Moreover, getting elected is seen as just a quick way to earn money to fund one's development project or build one's permanent house. Some elected officials have resigned midterm when they discovered they weren't going to earn enough to bankroll a project, and meanwhile their responsibilities were keeping them from pursuing their business goals.

It should be mentioned that in the *laliru'anga* discourse the way in which a year is characterized means more than simply labeling it by a certain business. The characterization also reflects the positive and negative experiences that villagers have, given the type or types of businesses prevalent in a particular year. Positive experiences may include the successful completion of a water system, villagers launching a successful protest

against a transnational corporation seeking to operate a logging project in their area, or a particular descent group finally being able to purchase a large pickup truck to use as transportation between Auki and the villages.

On the surface, *laliru'anga* may seem like just another example of the way in which villagers are not able to stick with anything long enough to realize the benefits. However, while the villagers' lack of experience with running small businesses is an important factor, on closer examination the phenomenon is closely tied to structures and spheres of influence that are simply beyond their control. The yearly displacement of old projects by new ones is connected to the budgetary allocation policies of both the central and the provincial governments for local grants and project support funding. These policies in turn are contingent on the decisions of foreign aid-donating governments and other international organizations. Figuring prominently is the frequency with which structural change, especially policy change, occurs in the central and provincial governments. This in itself is indicative of the influence that international governments and organizations exert on domestic policies in the Solomon Islands.

In essence, what *laliru'anga* shows is the lack of control and independence that small third world countries like the Solomon Islands have over their economies. Having been locked into the capitalist world economy, the way such countries make economic decisions internally is firmly controlled by external powers (Chase-Dunn 1989; Wallace 1990; A Smith 1991). Thus, while the Solomon Islands national parliament, for example, may unanimously pass a trade bill, how or whether that bill successfully responds to the various local needs for which it is designed depends largely on the decisions of the international organizations from which financial support to carry it out is sought. *Laliru'anga* is the way that this degree of powerlessness of the periphery to control internal decisions (currently known as globalization) has an impact on rural villagers where every year villagers feel forced to chase a new wave of businesses. The phenomenon has created among some villagers a certain fatalistic attitude where they routinely question their own abilities to do anything meaningful. (Similar processes occur in coastal Papua New Guinea; see M Smith 1994).

The feeling of being constantly victimized by social forces beyond their power to control is one of the reasons why Kwara'ae villagers see *bisnis* as a dead or inactive mode of production. The concept of "dead" or "inactive" expresses the notion that, by mostly producing negative results,

bisnis seems to lack the capacity to promote *gwaumauri'anga*, the ultimate state of being toward which the Kwara'ae strive in most things they do.

Laliru'anga demonstrates the opposite of what economists and development theorists mean by *diversification*, and it happens because of the constraints on development policies and funding. Moreover, development policies that reflect only a superficial knowledge of local resources are likely to result in projects that will not be sustainable.

The third way in which the Kwara'ae see *bisnis* as dead involves the issue of material possessions. With the primary emphasis on profit and accumulation, the Kwara'ae see the principles of *bisnis* as running counter to the Kwara'ae cultural value of sharing (*fangale'a'anga*). *Bisnis*, therefore, is dangerous in having the potential to divide and fragment families and communities.

Finally, *bisnis* as dead has to do with the issue of something *emerging* from one's own hands as opposed to something acquired secondhand. Things that emerge from one's hands, such as garden produce, are regarded as "alive." However, the West Kwara'ae regard goods sold in a trade store (eg, tinned meat, soap, yardage) as dead because the products have been manufactured by someone else. The fish in a tin of tuna is literally dead, and its only "life" is in terms of its monetary value.

Diflopmen

In contrast to *bisnis*, the Kwara'ae view *diflopmen* as a mode of operation promoting life in line with the philosophy of *gwaumauri'anga*. As mentioned earlier, the Kwara'ae notion of development is embedded in several concepts in their traditional discourse. The conditions characterizing *diflopmen* as an "alive" (*ru mauri*) mode of operation are numerous, and I will only illustrate a few here (for further discussion, see Gegeo 1994).

The most important distinguishing characteristic of *diflopmen* to the West Kwara'ae is that a project so labeled *saka ma'i mana* or *fa'asia limana ngwae* 'emerges out of one's own hands'. The concept of *emergence* does not necessarily mean that the idea for a project originates with oneself. Rather, the fact that one takes up an idea even if it is someone else's means that one becomes the new "originator" in terms of emergence. Thus, one must take an idea that is an abstraction and give it life by turning it into a project—that is, the idea materializes or achieves physical growth (*bulao*) through one's own work. Examples of projects or businesses that fall under the rubric of *diflopmen* would include a small,

villager-owned and family-operated cocoa or coconut plantation, or a piggery. These involve living plants and animals, which themselves can be seen to grow and multiply. However, the distinction is less between kinds of projects than between goals and strategies. For instance, two small village stores may be selling the same products. What distinguishes one as *ru mauri* (*diflopmen*) and the other as *ru mae* (*bisnis*) includes the attitude and goals of the owner: for example, seeing the store as a garden serving the basic needs of the community and family, with profit balanced by social goals, versus the store as exclusively profit-oriented and the owner as socially superior to customers. In the latter case, these characteristics together with others result in villagers seeing the store as *bisnis* and part of *malafaka'anga* 'pseudo-westernization'.

Important to the concept of *diflopmen'anga* is the issue of knowledge (*sai'iru'anga*) that the West Kwara'ae found wanting in the large-scale projects introduced and operated by the colonial government and transnational corporations. Whatever knowledge the projects might have offered, the subservient positions of the Kwara'ae as laborers prevented them from acquiring it. According to the West Kwara'ae, a villager who engages in a project gains knowledge about it in the process of developing and operating it. Eventually a situation of *interdependence* or *symbiosis* (*riri to'oto'o'anga*) evolves, wherein the owner and the project *alu ta'i ru* 'become a single entity or unity'.

Also critically important in *diflopmen'anga* is life, embedded in the concept of *maumauri talau'anga* 'living continuously', represented here as indestructibility. For instance, the primary reason someone may want to start a coconut plantation is to sell copra. If, however, the price of copra fluctuates on the world market, the owner will not lose the whole coconut plantation. While waiting for the price to stabilize or rise, owners and their families can use the coconuts from the plantation for many other purposes, including selling them on the local market, consuming them domestically, and so forth. As the West Kwara'ae see it, whatever the owner does with a coconut plantation (except destroy the palms by cutting them down or burning them), the supply of nuts cannot be exhausted (*'iri mutala*); it is alive and renewable (*fungufungu talau*; literally, "bearing eternally"). At the level of kin and other social ties, a coconut plantation's bearing eternally also means that villagers' relationships with each other will remain unsevered. Due to its durability and the fact that it bears all year round, coconut is one of the primary

food sources in Kwara'ae through which the cultural norm of sharing is maintained.

To the West Kwara'ae, success in *bisnis* lies largely in the extent to which the owner of a project is dedicated to pursuing it. Success of a project in *diflopmen'anga*, however, is firmly rooted in (*sau ngasi ana*) the mutual activities of human beings and nature, that is, in their cooperation (*'adofi-ku'anga*) with each other. Implied by the concept of *indestructibility* (*maumauri talau'anga*) associated with *diflopmen'anga* is the notion of a *symbiotic relationship* (*riri to'oto'o'anga*, literally, "the mutual leaning on each other") that villagers say inevitably develops when human beings respect natural limits.

CONCLUSION

Development as introduced and promoted by the colonial and postcolonial governments in the Solomon Islands is, in principle, modernization, made especially obvious by the emphasis on economic development to the exclusion of other aspects of development. In contrast, the Kwara'ae approach development from a holistic perspective. Two concepts used by Kwara'ae villagers to express this holistic perspective are *lia ali'afu'anga* 'see in completeness', and *dau ali'afu'anga* 'hold in completeness'. The latter refers to a body of knowledge.

Embraced or contained by these two concepts are a host of other concepts. One of these is *talau'anga* 'standing on one's own', which conveys the notion of being able to meet all of one's needs (economic, spiritual, psychological, and so on). Another is *talasasiru'anga* 'doing things on one's own', which conveys the idea of having the ability, self-confidence, and foresight to design and implement plans as one sees fit, that is, independently. Together these concepts, with others, constitute the emancipatory discourse of *gwaumauri'anga* that the Kwara'ae argue should be the principal objective of rural development.

The contrast between *bisnis* as a dead and *diflopmen* as an alive mode of operation encapsulates the Kwara'ae notion of the difference between a modernization concept of development and their own concept, rooted in *gwaumauri'anga*. To the Kwara'ae, using their indigenous knowledge in the pursuit of *diflopmen'anga* is the avenue through which they feel *ngasingasi'a* 'empowered' and *aloge* 'emancipated'. This is not to reject the possibility of learning and incorporating other forms of knowledge

into one's project. Rather, in using indigenous knowledge the Kwara'ae feel *manata fauto'o* 'confident' and *tua* or *sasi ru takadalafa* 'comfortable'. They feel alienated by activities and projects that require mainly Anglo-European knowledge. When individuals participate in something in which they feel alienated or forced to participate, that participation is mechanical and is not seen as a part of the Kwara'ae concept of *diflopmen'anga*. In other words, it is not development to them, it is *bisnis*. The discourse of negativity associated with *bisnis* includes feelings of unsureness, lack of confidence, and a sense of being manipulated or dictated to by outside forces. *Bisnis* is *ru fi'i ru'u ma'i* 'something that enters from the outside'. Another way in which West Kwara'ae villagers express *bisnis* as a foreign thing is that it is *'iri futa saena ano kia* 'not born on the land'.

The positive discourse associated with *diflopmen'anga* includes enlightenment and empowerment, and leads to a long-term commitment to succeed. A symbiotic relationship between the doer and the project means that a project becomes part of one's life, and emerges from within—*saena ru'uru'u 'i ngwae* 'from the heart'.

The power of a form of rural development based on indigenous epistemology and indigenous knowledge is shown in the growing instances of West Kwara'ae men and women who, after a string of unsuccessful projects over the past twenty years, are today operating successful small projects that help to meet their families' needs (see Gegeo 1994). They have turned away from chasing new projects and trying to tailor what they do along the lines of an outside model. They are supported in their turn toward and expansion of an indigenous model by the critical discussions of *diflopmen*, *gwaumauri'anga*, and *falafala* that go on in small groups and village meetings as people gather in the evenings or on Sunday afternoons to talk. More and more, villagers see that project failures are related to the kinds of projects that have been promoted by the government, and to their being pressured to adopt foreign ways of thinking and doing that were not integrated into their indigenous system. A comment by one villager expressed what many of the West Kwara'ae villagers in my study told me: "I have been observing [rural development] more closely for these past few years, and today I realize that we the village people just didn't know. We were being forced to do things in a different way, and that is why we did all kinds of things. But nowadays our eyes are open."

The argument I am making on behalf of the role of indigenous knowl-

edge and epistemology in development is in keeping with the current discourse among academics, professionals, and activists—from both the metropolitan centers and the periphery—that calls for historically silent voices to be recognized as legitimate and deserving to be heard (see Wilmer 1993; Trask 1993; Pieterse and Parekh 1995; JanMohamed and Lloyd 1990). Indigenous knowledge has been treated simply as ethnoscience, folk knowledge, or an esoteric body of information (see, eg, Scott 1996). My position is that these views, while well intentioned, still treat indigenous knowledge as the marked category of the “Other” (Hutcheon 1989; Lather 1991; Aronowitz and Giroux 1991; Nicholson and Seidman 1995). Recognition of the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge is still qualified. The fact that the applicability of indigenous knowledge sometimes falls short of human expectations makes it no less legitimate than scientific knowledge, which is by no means immune to error.

Lest the skeptic feel that this line of argument is merely the unsubstantiated personal views of a “disgruntled Other” seeking legitimacy for indigenous systems of knowledge, here is how the internationally renowned anthropologist Laura Nader (1996, 7) saw the issue: “If knowledge is born of experience and reason . . . and if science is a phenomenon universally characterized (after the insight) by rationality, then are not indigenous systems of knowledge part of the scientific knowledge of mankind?” And in arguing more specifically for how much the indigenous knowledge systems of nonwestern societies have continuously informed western medicine, Nader added:

[W]e have been exploiting indigenous knowledge for centuries. When there is advantage to be gained, we are neither Eurocentric nor ethnocentric. Among the best entrepreneurial examples are the pharmaceutical companies who for decades have been exploring Amazonia, Mexico, Polynesia, and other parts of the world to find products that work. They produce these products in laboratories and eventually sell them back to native peoples who are described as being ignorant of modern medicine. (1996, 11)

The call for a recognition of indigenous knowledge is critically important because it is when people start thinking about and articulating development in their own terms that they put into motion the process of dehegemonization (Gramsci 1971). Dehegemonization starts to take root once anchored in people’s epistemology, because it is when they create truth about something that they form a discursive framework on the basis

of which they act. In this connection, dehegemonization is not very different from what is for the Kwara'ae *gwaumauri'anga*, as I have tried to show in this paper. Both concepts express or connote a state of social existence in which emancipation and empowerment reign as the paradigms and frameworks of social expression.

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Notes

1 The notion and categories of human needs are not derived from western ideas, but instead are part of the *kula* 'part, place' theory of person in Kwara'ae (see Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990). All of the labels used are very old high rhetoric terms: *ulu ma'e bo'obo'o'anga ki* 'triad of human needs' (literally, "three distinct kinds of needs"); *bo'obo'o'anga ana mangona ngwae* 'spiritual needs' (literally, "need of a person's spirit or breath"); *bo'obo'o'anga ana manatalana ngwae* 'psychological needs' (literally, "need of a person's mind or thinking"); and *bo'obo'o'anga ana nonina ngwae* or *bo'obo'o'anga ana noni* 'physical needs' (literally, "need of a person's body" or "need of the body").

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Abstract

The argument that rural development serving the needs of rural villagers in the third world should be based on indigenous knowledge is not new. In practice, however, development projects continue to be based on Anglo-European models. In this paper I examine what development anchored in indigenous knowledge and indigenous epistemology entails as seen from the perspective of an indigenous Pacific Islander. I show that the Kwara'ae of Malaita, Solomon Islands, have a rich and complex conception, body of knowledge, and discourse about development, much of which precedes western contact.

KEYWORDS: indigenous knowledge, indigenous epistemology, Kwara'ae, modernization, rural development, Solomon Islands