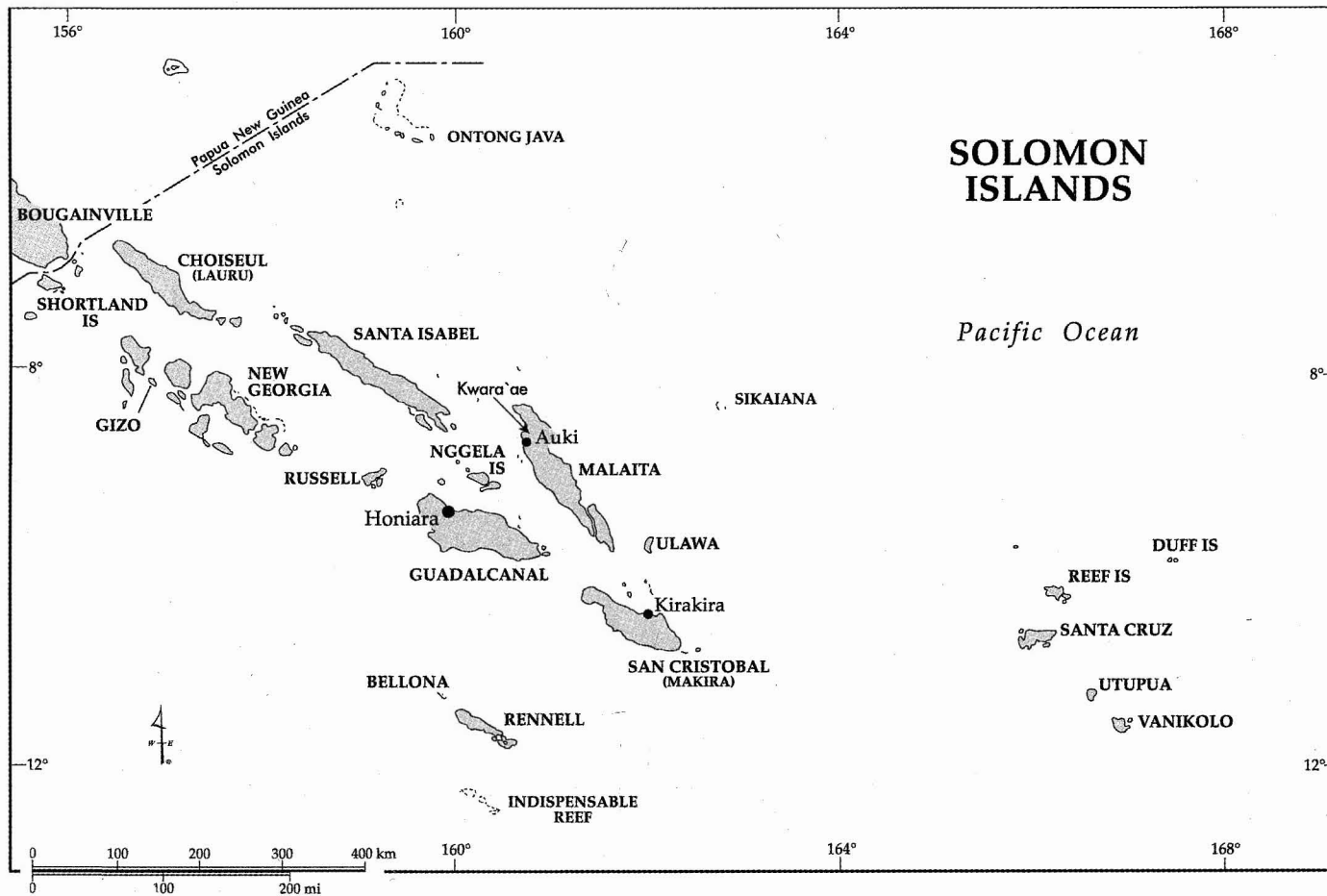# "How We Know": Kwara'ae Rural Villagers Doing Indigenous Epistemology

David Welchman Gegeo and Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo

Around the world today indigenous ethnic groups are asserting the validity of their own ways of knowing and being, in resistance to the intensifying hegemony of mainstream epistemology from the metropolitan powers. This assertion is not happening only among third-world scholars familiar with the challenges to Anglo-European cosmology and epistemology from postmodernists over the past several decades. It is also happening among rural villagers with little or no schooling or awareness of the debates going on internationally in philosophy and the social sciences. Moreover, the assertion is not only about ethnic identity and revitalizing culture. Villagers are also themselves exploring how they construct knowledge: instead of always being the subject of research by outsiders, which they often see as exploitation, they are undertaking the recording and writing of their own cultures based on their indigenous epistemologies. Indigenous epistemology refers to a cultural group's ways of theorizing knowledge, as we discuss later.

The Kwara'ae Genealogy Project is just such an assertion by a group of rural villagers in West Kwara'ae, Malaita, Solomon Islands (map 1). Officially constituted in early 1994 by members of several small villages, the project has continued to grow and to involve multiple activities. We examine how project members are doing indigenous epistemology as the basis of their research. Not only are they discussing, arguing, and recording culture, but they are also critiquing and examining in a self-reflexive process their own indigenous strategies for creating knowledge.

Indigenous projects like the one examined here offer us Native Pacific Islander scholars a direction for the next stage of decolonization—dehegemonization.[1] To bring decolonization to the level of dehegemonization means that we Native Pacific Islander scholars need to find our own

156° 160° 164° 168°

Papua New Guinea
Solomon Islands

ONTONG JAVA

SOLOMON
ISLANDS

BOUGAINVILLE

CHOISEUL
(LAURU)

SHORTLAND
IS

SANTA ISABEL

Pacific Ocean

8° 8°

NEW
GEORGIA

Kwara`ae

SIKAIANA

GIZO

Auki

NGGELA
IS

MALAITA

RUSSELL

Honiara

ULAWA

DUFF IS

REEF IS

GUADALCANAL

Kirakira

SANTA CRUZ

BELLONA

SAN CRISTOBAL
(MAKIRA)

UTUPUA

RENNELL

VANIKOLO

12° 12°

INDISPENSABLE
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0 100 200 300 400 km

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160° 164° 168°

MAP 1.

research and epistemic frameworks rather than continue to rely exclusively on those of the colonizer. In our talk about decolonization, we Pacific Islanders often complain that colonialism has undermined our ways of knowing and doing. What are these ways of knowing?—By this we do not mean just the content of traditional knowledge or *kastom,* but rather how knowledge is theorized and constructed, encoded, and passed on to the next generation. Our concern in this paper, therefore, is not with what outside scholars have said, interpreted, or constructed regarding our Pacific Island cultures and traditional knowledges. Instead we are concerned with how we Pacific Islanders ourselves use our native epistemologies to construct and theorize knowledge. Although much has been published about Pacific knowledges, most of this material has been written by cultural outsiders using Anglo-European epistemologies. As a result, as authors we are very selective in this paper about work that we consider to be, first, specifically about epistemology (rather than the recording or reconstructing or reinterpreting of culture, knowledge, *kastom,* and so forth, however valuable previous work may have been); second, work by those Anglo-European scholars who transcend the paradigms of mainstream scholarship in the direction of recognizing ways of doing epistemology on the periphery; and third, directly relevant work done by native or indigenous Pacific Island scholars themselves on epistemology. In making these choices, we hope to encourage Native Pacific Islander students and scholars to turn their attention to indigenous or native epistemologies as the beginning of a new generation of work on cultural knowledge. We are not claiming our work to be the first of its kind. However, we believe that little has been done so far that truly warrants being characterized as epistemological.

WHAT IS EPISTEMOLOGY?

Epistemology refers to both the theory of knowledge and theorizing knowledge, including the nature, sources, frameworks, and limits of knowledge (Goldman 1986, 1999; Fuller 1988; Landesman 1997; Audi 1998). Epistemology is concerned with who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, sources of evidence for constructing knowledge, what constitutes truth, how truth is to be verified, how evidence becomes truth, how valid inferences are to be drawn, the role of belief in evidence, and related issues.

As Moser, Mulder, and Trout have argued, "Knowledge, of course, is not the same as a *theory of* knowledge, just as a mind is not the same as a theory of the mind, a psychology" (1998, 4; emphasis in original). Record-

ing an account or interpreting some aspect of a culture (eg, *kastom*) is not the same as examining a people's epistemology. The epistemological question, rather, is, How is that body of knowledge people call *kastom* put together? How is it theorized? More generally, how is knowledge of any kind theorized, created, reformulated, and encoded through a people's epistemology? What are the epistemological strategies used to do this kind of philosophical work?

Social epistemologists such as Steve Fuller (1988) and feminist epistemologists such as Lynn Nelson (1993) recognize with the sociologists of knowledge (Dant 1991; Bloor 1991; Stehr 1994) that epistemological agents are communities rather than individuals. In other words, knowledge is constructed by communities—epistemological communities—rather than collections of independently knowing individuals, and that "such communities are epistemologically prior to individuals who know" (Nelson 1993, 124).

When outside researchers, including anthropologists, write ethnographic accounts of other people's knowledge(s), or construct theories of other people's cultures, they certainly constitute an epistemological community. But it is not the epistemological community that created the knowledge they are retheorizing. In other words, anthropological theories of other people's cultures are not indigenous theories of those cultures. Anthropological accounts of other people's cultures are not indigenous accounts of those cultures, even though they may be based on interviews with and observations of indigenous communities, individuals, and societies. All of the foregoing activities, while they draw on indigenous cultural knowledge, are imagined, conceptualized, and carried out within the theoretical and methodological frameworks of Anglo-European forms of research, reasoning, and interpreting.

The concept of indigenous epistemology distinguishes between these outsider theories and accounts of other people's knowledge, on the one hand, and cultural insiders' ways of theorizing knowledge, on the other.

INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGY AND INDIGENOUS CRITICAL PRAXIS

By *indigenous epistemology* we mean a cultural group's ways of thinking and of creating, reformulating, and theorizing about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of the discourse in culture (Gegeo 1994, 1998; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1999). From the Kwara'ae standpoint, indigenous ways of creating knowledge

are part of the *kula* 'point, part, place' system or mosaic of cultural knowledge that includes the whole person, family, kin group, and society (see Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990). As a concept, indigenous epistemology focuses on the process through which knowledge is constructed and validated by a cultural group, and the role of that process in shaping thinking and behavior. It assumes all epistemological systems to be socially constructed and (in)formed through sociopolitical, economic, and historical context and processes. It also recognizes that culture is variable, an ongoing conversation embodying conflict and change, shaped by the dialectic of structure and agency (Giddens 1979), inherently ideological, and prone to manipulation and distortion by powerful interests (Foucault 1980; Gramsci 1978; Habermas 1979).

What is the relationship between culture or *kastom* and indigenous epistemology? In Kwara'ae from an indigenous perspective, *falafala* (*kastom* in Solomon Islands Pijin) embraces culture, tradition, norms and modes of behavior; ways of thinking, doing, and creating; and, of course, indigenous epistemology. Anything born of the land and passed from generation to generation is part of *kastom*. Indigenous epistemology is an inextricable part of *falafala*, and the kind of discussions involved are rooted in Kwara'ae tradition, not an epiphenomenon of colonization and western schooling. We do not deny that people's practices may to some extent be affected by interactions with other cultures. However, the terms we discuss for Kwara'ae indigenous epistemological strategies are very old Kwara'ae terms, and testify to the indigeneity of indigenous epistemology.[2]

Indigenous critical praxis refers to people's own critical reflection on culture, history, knowledge, politics, economics, and the sociopolitical contexts in which they are living their lives; and then their taking the next step to act on these critical reflections (Gegeo, nd). It flows from and is deeply rooted in indigenous epistemology. By engaging in indigenous critical praxis, villagers transform their epistemology and in the process are themselves also transformed.

INVESTIGATING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND EPISTEMOLOGIES

A primary activity of anthropology has always been recording people's cultural knowledge. Ethnoscience has focused on taxonomic knowledges in certain domains (recent examples include Morrison, Geraghty, and Crowl 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1994d), and cognitive anthropology has examined how knowledge is learned and how it is organized in cultural models (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Holland and Quinn 1987; Shore

1996; Strauss and Quinn 1997). In recent years attention has turned to indigenous knowledge systems in relation to how they are being (re)constituted in a globalized world, the distribution of knowledge, and the role of indigenous knowledge in social change and development.[3] Studies are also being done on ethnophilosophy (eg, see Imbo 1998).

Work in all these areas necessarily overlaps with indigenous epistemology, even where that may not be the focus of study (Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972; Firth 1998; Salmond 1985; Telban 1998; Obrist van Eeuwijk 1998). As a specific topic, however, indigenous epistemology has received far less attention than other aspects of knowledge systems. Moreover, even work that aims to focus on indigenous epistemology tends to lapse into lengthy critiques of mainstream Anglo-European epistemology and its exclusive, androcentric, universalistic approach to knowledge (Alcoff and Potter 1993; Kenney and Kinsella 1997; Smith 1999). Relatively few studies so far have examined the nature of an indigenous epistemology and its use in creating knowledge (eg, Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972; Gegeo 1994; Gegeo 1998; Meyer 1998a, 1998b; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo, in press).

Our intention here is not to discuss and critique the existing literature on cultural knowledge (which is vast) or indigenous epistemology. Instead our primary concern is to describe how the Kwara'ae theorize knowledge, and the strategies used in the doing of epistemological work in the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project (KGP).

In agreeing with the need to transcend the Anglo-European perspective on epistemology raised by postmodernists, we are guided by the notion of *standpoint epistemology* as developed by feminists, which recognizes that "[k]nowledge claims are always socially situated" (Harding 1993, 54) rather than universalistic. We attempt to write insofar as possible from the periphery, that is, from the Kwara'ae standpoint. We do this on the basis of Gegeo's native knowledge of Kwara'ae indigenous cosmology and epistemology, together with our more than twenty years of related research in rural Kwara'ae. KGP data include in-depth interviews conducted by Gegeo in 1994 and 1998; frequent letter-tapes to us from project leaders since 1994; and transcripts (in Kwara'ae) from project meetings, discussions, and other activities.

When we use terms such as *culture* or *tradition*, although we are thoroughly aware of the debates around these terms in anthropology specifically,[4] and in the humanities and social sciences generally, we are employing the terms as the Kwara'ae use them. The Kwara'ae are by no means naive about the complexity of "culture," as is reflected in their discourse.

Falafala 'culture, tradition' refers to the widely shared cultural practices and values in Kwara'ae ("our *falafala*"), much of which is sacred. *Falafala* also refers to variation within this shared culture, that is, differing beliefs, perspectives, values and behaviors that vary with individuals, villages, or districts within Kwara'ae ("his/her *falafala*," "that village/clan's *falafala*"), as well as the practices and beliefs of other cultural groups ("British *falafala*"). *Falafala* also includes the notion that culture is always changing (*falafala rokisi'anga* 'the process of culture change'). Kwara'ae make a three-way distinction among versions of traditional culture that have come down to them (*falafala 'ua'ua/na'o'na'o,* literally, 'culture ancient/earlier than now'), culture as changing from generation to generation (*falafala rokisi,* literally, 'culture changes/is changing'), and culture as introduced or imposed from the outside through missionization and globalization (*falafala faolo/fi'i dao,* literally, 'culture new/just arrived'). Nevertheless, Kwara'ae identity is closely tied to speaking Kwara'ae language and knowing indigenous epistemology.

KNOWER, KNOWING, AND KNOWLEDGE IN KWARA'AE

The Kwara'ae are the largest cultural group in the Solomons and constitute one of ten linguistic/cultural groups on Malaita, the most populous island. The villages involved in the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project are located in West Kwara'ae, which has undergone rapid social change over the past several decades as the location of Malaita's provincial headquarters, primary urban center (Auki), major hospitals and an airfield, and as a center for intense mission and development activity. However, villagers' levels of schooling remain low, villages are economically poor, and villagers still identify strongly with many aspects of their traditional culture as they define it. In the past twenty years, a resurgence of interest in traditional culture (*falafala;* or *kastom* in Solomon Islands Pijin) has spread through the Pacific Islands generally. In Kwara'ae, that interest has resulted partly from the failure of modernization and rural development paradigms based on Anglo-European epistemology and assumptions about what rural villagers need.[5] In the 1980s Kwara'ae villagers began turning back to their own ways of constructing and analyzing knowledge to design small-scale development projects that worked for them in the immediate human and natural environment, and that were aimed at developing the whole person *(ngwae ali'afu)* rather than strictly economic goals. This concern for wholeness or completeness *(ali'afu'anga)* springs from the cultural life-

goal of achieving *gwaumauri'anga* (literally, 'the being at the head/pinnacle of life'), the essence of the 'good life' *(mauri'a le'a)* (see Gegeo 1994).

One of the major components of *gwaumauri'anga* is being able to create or construct knowledge, that is, being an indigenous epistemologist. In Kwara'ae epistemology, virtually anyone can be the knower (*[ngwae] sai'i ru,* 'knower, person who has knowledge'; and secondarily, a 'person with secret knowledge, such as a healer, sorcerer', implying an epistemologist of knowledge lying outside ordinary social reality), although there are bodies of knowledge in which people specialize. The process of knowing and knowledge are glossed by *sai'iru'anga* (where *sai* is 'know', and *sai'i ru* is 'know (of) something/things'; *sai ana* is 'know it/him/her').

All knowledge is subjective knowledge in Kwara'ae: there can be no detachment of the knower from the known as in mainstream Anglo-European epistemology, as exemplified in logical positivism with its focus on "objective knowledge," especially Karl Popper's concept of "knowledge without a knower" (1972).[6] Thus the scientific notion of *objectivity* as classically defined in positivism does not exist in Kwara'ae. To the Kwara'ae knowledge is socially constructed by communities of knowledge-makers. In the past, when they spent time at the *bisi* 'menstrual hut', women occupied much of their time discussing, (re)constructing, and sharing knowledge, and men did the same in the *fera* 'men's house'. Today as in the past, village meetings and *fa'amanata'anga* 'teaching, counseling' sessions are spaces where knowledge communities meet and do their epistemological work. Traditionally, epistemic communities followed clan boundaries. The Kwara'ae Genealogy Project, however, has deliberately breached clan boundaries to incorporate knowledgeable leaders from other clans in their research. In the past, of course, this breaching also occurred when clans came together to discuss land issues, and engaged in speechmaking and negotiations that (re)constructed accounts of land ownership.

Based on the findings of second-generation cognitive science and their previous work on metaphor, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) have argued, as did Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964), for the primacy of perception: that is, human beings know the world primarily through their bodily senses. This use of the body to know the world is an epistemological universal. It is not surprising, therefore, that sensory information is privileged among the sources of information from which the Kwara'ae construct knowledge. People often question the reliability of their and others' senses in making truth claims. While sensory information is a universal, however, the interpretations of what such information conveys tend to vary across epistemological communities.

The Kwara'ae regard the whole body as knowing and as an organ of knowledge creation, similar to Merleau-Ponty's (1964) and Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) notion of the embodiment of perception (see also Scheper-Hughes and Loch 1987; Grosz 1993; Csordas 1994). The embodied senses are: see *(lisi)*, hear *(rongo)*, touch *(dau to'ana)*, smell *(moko to'ana)*, taste *(mea to'ana)*, and feel in the body *(noni to'ea)*. *Lisi* glosses five kinds of seeing: physical seeing with the eyes; seeing with the mind (eg, insight, foresight); seeing the unseen or invisible (eg, spirits), a gift or ability that extends the physical and temporal boundaries of physical seeing; seeing a person walk by in a flash that no one else sees, as a communication of something to happen; and seeing in a dream. Two kinds of dreams *(maliu/mo'osu bole'anga)* are recognized: regular dreams, which may or may not make sense in everyday terms; and psychic dreaming, which predicts a future reality and may come from an ancestral spirit or recently dead relative. The dreamer distinguishes between them by bodily symptoms associated with psychic dreams, which usually occur during shallow sleep or when half-awake and include rapid heartbeat and sweating or feeling hot. Psychic dreams are epistemologically important, and if the dreamer cannot figure out their meanings, informal specialists in dream interpretation will be consulted.

Yet another kind of seeing involves seeing something (eg, the nature of an illness, the outcome of an event, the image or shadow of a person) through a medium, such as clear liquid in a container, a ritually treated leaf, or a *ma'e dami* 'stick used to stir lime in a lime container for betel-nut chewing'. This kind of seeing is known to traditional healers.

Similarly, two kinds of hearing are recognized: ordinary sound or hearing; and hearing human sounds (that no one else hears) very early in the morning, often while it is still dark. These sounds are predictive of events that are about to happen, such as someone's death.

Feeling in the body or on the skin *(noni to'ea)* refers to being overcome by certain sensations in the body, all of which include a rapid heartbeat and nervousness. Sweating or goose bumps with the body hair standing on end *(noni nara)* is equivalent to the Hawaiian ' *kaala*. *'Inikakadi* is the feeling of ants biting or pinching one's skin or crawling on or under the skin, equivalent to the Hawaiian *'aki'aki* and *'e'eu* (our spelling of Hawaiian terms follows Pukui and Elbert 1965). *Tatai/kulu* involves the legs suddenly feeling heavy and falling asleep, equivalent to the Hawaiian *m 'e'ele* or *hu'ihu'i* (these Hawaiian examples are taken from Meyer 1998a, 1998b). The person may also feel faint or dizzy, and the eyes may feel like they are spinning *(tatari abula)*. All of these symptoms may mean that an ancestral

spirit is communicating something about to happen, or that someone is hiding in the bushes ahead on a path—possibly a sorcerer, or in the past, someone bent on ambush. Today, this category has been expanded to include the possibility of a wild dog or pig, a poisonous snake, or a spirit crossing ahead on the path; or that one's lover may be ahead.

Noni to'ea differs from another kind of sense knowledge, *manata to'ea* 'mind/think, fall on, as a spear hitting a target', which may be glossed as 'intuition'. Sometimes the two go together, however. Another sense is *fīa,* 'intuit or feel, in body and/or mind'. Because of the similarity in sound, speakers sometimes substitute the Pijin *filim* for this term. *Fī* 'be in pain, feel pain' extends to three kinds of pain: physical, emotional/mental, and intuition/body feeling "pain" (*fīa* is used exclusively for the last).

Knowledge is also constructed through trial and error, the primary form of experimentation in Kwara'ae: *ilia* 'try it'; and if it works, what was tried is said to be *ilia ka to'o* 'try it [and] it's correct/sharp/on target', or if it fails, *ilia ka tala* 'try it [and] its path misses the target'; less formal expressions are *ilia ka ta'a* 'try it [and] it's bad' or *'iri to'o* 'not correct/sharp/on target'.

Oral tradition is a source from which new knowledge can be created through expansion or deletion, because it is received knowledge that has been tested through everyday life or trial-and-error experimentation, and is capable of further improvement. Usually the improvement or expansion is context-bound, that is, tied to the immediate circumstances of changed conditions such that further experimentation is required. The rate of expansion in many areas of oral tradition has increased today due to the need to invent solutions as Kwara'ae district experiences rapid environmental decline because of logging, overpopulation, and other ecological processes forcing rapid adjustment in forms of house-building, cooking, planting, and the like.

Two other sources of knowledge in Kwara'ae epistemology are direct communication from the ancestors, and signs. The ancestors (*ko'obora,* counting backward in time from one's grandparents) may communicate in dreams, trance, or unexpected phenomena interpreted as messages from them. For example, a bad omen *(fa'anada'a, fa'anada'anga)* may be something appearing where it is not supposed to—a death, or a school of fish appearing where that species does not normally travel—and perceived as having been sent by an ancestor. The fish example might be interpreted as sent by a deceased relative who was skilled at fishing.

Signs *(fa'ata'i'anga* or *fa'ata'inga'a)* can be from an ancestor or a recently dead relative, but generally come from unspecified sources, such

as nature or an unknown spirit. Signs can also be created or events caused by living people who have *mamana'anga* 'intrinsic power, efficacy' (see Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 1996) within themselves, which allows them to make things happen separately from sorcery. Today signs can also come from the Christian God, although if so, the Kwara'ae do not regard them as involved in the construction of knowledge via indigenous epistemology. They are careful to keep distinct what comes from Christianity or God and what comes from indigenous culture.

Here West Kwara'ae contrasts with other areas of the Pacific where such knowledges are deliberately blended (eg, Pukui, Haertig, and Lee 1972; White 1991). We and members of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project are not arguing that no blending has occurred. The past two decades, however, have seen a major shift in West Kwara'ae among members of the Anglican and Catholic churches (which together constitute the majority of the population), and more recently, among members of the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The shift involves recognizing the importance of traditional knowledge and culture over introduced or imposed knowledges and cultures, and a determination to sort out where the latter have affected and distorted the former. West Kwara'ae people are highly articulate about cultural differences—and have been so at least going back to the 1950s when Gegeo was a child. Accounts we have recorded suggest that the concern with cultural difference and the intensive teaching of traditional cultural knowledge dates to the late nineteenth century's blackbirding and plantation-labor migration period (Bennett 1987), which formed a watershed in West Kwara'ae history. The more recent determination to separate out traditional from introduced knowledges has been triggered by the massive failure of Anglo-European–designed development in West Kwara'ae since the 1960s (Gegeo 1994), as mentioned earlier. Beyond these factors, Malaitans in general have adhered to their cultural identity and independence more than some other groups in the Solomons (as indicated by Maasina Rule [Keesing and Corris 1980] and the persistence of the ancestral religion in both Kwara'ae and Kwaio). Much more could be said on these issues; however, ultimately they lie outside the focus of this paper.

Finally, we have noted some instances where *Kanaka Maoli* (Native Hawaiian) interpretations of sensory information parallel those of the Kwara'ae, but there are others. No doubt many of the processes we have just outlined for Kwara'ae are found throughout indigenous cultures of the Pacific Islands.

Spaces in which much of the justified truth process takes place are village meetings *(ala'anga),* including those that deal with disputes or consti-

tute themselves as village courts; ordinary informal social gatherings such as marriage feasts and wakes/funerals; and *fa'amanata'anga* among groups of people, typically associated with both of those contexts. Questions posed include, Where did you hear it? Who did you hear it from? Did you see it with your own eyes/touch it/taste it/eat it/sniff it (etc)? Did you try it (to see if it worked, to ascertain its nature, etc)? Does this make sense in terms of everyday life experiences including our oral tradition *(falafala)?* Other groups' knowledge may also be given as evidence, as in "In village X or on island Y, people have done this and their experience has been Z"; or "they (specified) have been doing this for a long time and we are just arriving at it now." With regard to forms of body feeling, signs, and intuitions, the consistency in similar instances increases the confidence with which one uses these more subtle forms of evidence to justify an interpretation or construction.

Not all of these sources of evidence are used in everyday epistemological undertakings. We turn now to the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project to examine the epistemological strategies used in focused meetings.

The Kwara'ae Genealogy Project: Getting Started

In 1994 several members of the Liana clan (a pseudonym) joined together to follow up an idea they had been discussing for some years: researching and writing Kwara'ae culture, language, and history themselves. They were motivated first by the felt need to record cultural and linguistic information being lost as the older generation of men and women in their seventies and eighties died. The market economy, schooling, and church responsibilities are seriously eroding the time available to people to learn some of the deeper levels of cultural knowledge. Second, they felt clan oral history was being undermined by members of some Christian sects (eg, South Sea Evangelical, Seventh Day Adventist) who introduced into older accounts ideas and imagined events drawn from the Bible, thereby mixing the two systems, which they believed must be kept separate. Third, they wanted to create for future generations a written account of varying oral knowledges. The decision to do the project as a collaboration was itself traditional. Kin-based projects, such as setting up a cooperative trade store, typically involve people sharing their individual skills (planning, building, managing, literacy, and mathematics) to accomplish a group effort. Within the research group, some had basic literacy skills, a few knew tape-recording techniques, and others had specialized traditional knowledge(s) they could contribute.

Finally, the project group wanted to create an indigenous account of indigenous culture. For decades linguistic, anthropological, and development researchers had come to West Kwara'ae to collect data. Villagers not only felt much of this work to be exploitative, but they were unimpressed by what they regarded as very superficial questions that the researchers asked, and the non-Kwara'ae way in which they did their work. Because outside researchers used research strategies based on Anglo-European epistemology and ways of knowing, the villagers found themselves giving answers to questions and requests for narrations or expositions along lines constrained by the outsiders' epistemological assumptions. When the researchers had left, the villager interviewees would discuss among themselves what had happened and how they had responded to researcher questions. Uncomfortable about the information as they had co-constructed it with the researchers, they would say among themselves, "What we told that researcher is *dauk* ['dangling'] and not rooted in our indigenous cultural knowledge. It is an inaccurate and incomplete representation of Kwara'ae." They felt partly responsible for what was missing or distorted, but also constrained by the outsider's assumptions, approach, and limited language skills.[7] In contrast, KGP members wanted to discuss and debate traditional culture, to record the debates and discussions toward revitalizing tradition, and to make all of this part of the Kwara'ae historical record. Although the focus would be on Liana clan perspectives on language and culture, they decided to incorporate knowledge experts from surrounding clans with whom the Liana had long-term relationships and interactions.

The project group received seed money from a member of parliament and from Malaita Province to begin their cultural work and seek further support via a grant proposal. The group used the money to start the research and for the costs of producing the proposal. Details of the proposal were worked out in meetings, and written up in the required proposal format by a member in his twenties with a Form 2 (10th grade) secondary education. The proposal successfully secured SI$9,000 from the Australian High Commission to offset transportation and interviewee costs; purchase notebooks, pencils, a manual typewriter, typing paper, a tape-recorder, and audiotapes; and pay a small stipend to the typist who transcribed the notes. The other project members donated their time. The KGP founders were nine men and one woman; today the project team involves about two hundred members.

Kwara'ae Genealogy Project's research plan involves culturally recognized *gwaunga'i ki* 'elders' in fifteen kin units (clans, subclans, descent

groups). One of the clans actively involved is the largest in West Kwara-
'ae. The purpose of involving several clans was to enable comparisons of
different versions of cultural traditions. The project members thus are
very clear about there being different versions of cultural knowledge and
are concerned to include more than their own clan-affiliated understand-
ings.[8] The project group developed a format whereby a series of interviews
or meetings are held with a given kin group (about 20 hours per group) in
a village meeting house. Diagrams, terms, and issues that come up in the
discourse are written on a blackboard by someone with basic literacy, and
copied onto paper. Tapes are transcribed by three men in their forties with
previous, brief transcribing experience. The handwritten transcripts are
then typed by a young woman with vocational training.[9] Completed tran-
scripts are photocopied, and a copy is sent to us to be translated into Eng-
lish. During the first year of the project, we were asked to participate in
this way because KGP members want to publish their work in Kwara'ae for
local use, and in English to make it available to other Solomon and Pacific
Islanders.

KGP members decided to audiorecord and publish the results of their
work for two reasons. First, they recognize that because their children
today spend many hours a week in school, the process of socialization has
changed. They see the advantage of writing down cultural knowledge and
their epistemological process as a hedge against uncontrollable social
change. Second, they want people's own voices and cultural knowledge
written in their own words to be out in the public domain, just as the work
of outside researchers on them and other Pacific groups is available to the
public. They are therefore using western technology as tools to accom-
plish their objectives.

INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGICAL STRATEGIES IN THE
KWARA'AE GENEALOGY PROJECT

The decision by members of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project (*Isuisu'a 'i
Kwara'ae,* 'tracing the genealogy of Kwara'ae') to name their project *gene-
alogy* rather than *culture* was not lightly made. In Kwara'ae epistemology,
genealogy is a primary *fuli* 'source' of knowledge, and also gives knowl-
edge its *bibi* 'weight'. This usage is a metaphorical extension of the high
rhetoric meaning of *bibi,* a ritually treated stone buried in the sacrificial
hearth of the *fera bu* 'men's sacred house' where the *fata bu* 'priest' offers
sacrifices to the ancestral spirits. Together with the *kulu* 'weight; ritually

treated stone buried in the hearth of a family, village, or men's house', the *bibi* anchors villagers to *kula ni fuli* 'place' and symbolizes *babato'o'anga* 'stability', *aroaro'anga* 'peace,' and *tuafiku'anga* 'living in unity'. Metaphorically extended, then, genealogy is the *bibi* for kin group, land, social obligations, general cultural knowledge, and specialized knowledges. Each person's understanding of where he or she belongs in the genealogical net is directly connected to the kinds of knowledge and social responsibilities he or she has. Genealogy thus becomes a framework for knowledge embodying a set of cultural models.

KGP meetings take the form of the (set of) key cultural speech activity/ies for indigenous critical praxis in Kwara'ae: *talingisilana ala'anga* 'critical discussion' or 'enlightened dialogue' in high rhetoric (*ala'anga lalifu*, literally, 'importantly rooted speech'), the formal and semantically complex discourse register used on all important occasions and for all significant sociocultural topics. High rhetoric includes a large, rich lexicon of abstract terms with subtle distinctions for discussing concepts of person, social behavior, the natural world, society, and philosophical ideas. As in the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project, "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 argumentation and reasoning used in this Kwara'ae indigenous epistemological practice are named, and are taught to children in *fa'amanata'anga* sessions at home.

"Critical discussion" involves dialogic deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas. Some epistemological strategies include the following, all of which have been used in KGP sessions. Because of space limits, and because most of these strategies are played out over multiple sets of exchanges, we are unable to illustrate all of the strategies here with KGP discourse data.

Etangia or kwai'ia tala or tala'aena ala'anga

A topic is posed to 'start' *(etangia)* the talk; or 'cut' *(kwai'ia)* 'the discursive path' *(tala)*; or 'show the discursive path to walk' *(tala'aena ala'anga)*. Often the topic comes in the form of a question raised when listeners detect an ambiguity or suspect claim in someone's retelling of an event or presentation of information. In KGP meetings as in critical discussions generally, for example, such issues arise through contested accounts in reconstructing genealogies or land rights. Key points of possible or existing conflict are selected by the KGP group out of the larger ongoing stream of discourse and then discussed systematically.

Abira'anga

Whether attempting to resolve disputed claims, sort out confused information, or investigate the complexities of a body of knowledge, participants necessarily raise and discuss cultural concepts and practices entailed by the topic. They follow the lines or branches that lead from a specific issue to definitions of terms or discussions of processes and events involved in cultural institutions. *Abira'anga* 'branching out' refers to this epistemological strategy. As each topic or issue *birabira* 'sprout(s) into new shoots', then a closely related sprout or branch *(birabira ru)* can be followed via *abira'anga*. However, a new topic that substantially deviates from the path the current talk is following will be put on hold as a different branch or sprout until the current sprout of talk is finished. Over the several years of the project so far, *abira'anga* has led from genealogy to the complexities involved in major cultural institutions such as marriage, language, land, kinship and descent, ancestral religion, the position of women, tribal warfare, migration, compensation and retribution, and traditional law.

The following example illustrates both the move to a new branch of discussion and putting an inappropriate branch on hold. While reconstructing the genealogy of a subclan, an elder has given an account of a marriage between two clans that he participated in sixty years ago:

> YOUNG MAN 1: You said that during the *gani kini'anga* ['asking for the woman'], after the woman's parents agreed, the man's father in the party pulled out a *tafuli'ae* ['ten-stranded shell *mani* ('money, valuable')'] from his bag and handed it to the woman's father, and said "Here is a *tafuli'ae*. I *alufafi* ['cover'] this woman. She is now *bu* ['forbidden to marry another man, etc'']." But yesterday in talking with elders from the Tafu clan, they said that it doesn't happen that way. That is, you do not give the *tafuli'ae* on the night of the *gani kini'anga*. Instead you all agree for the *gani kini* party to return later with the *mani* for the *alufafikini'anga* ['covering of the woman in the sense of making her *bu* to other men'].

> ELDER 1: It depends. Different things can happen that lead to different strategies being taken.

> YOUNG MAN 2: Now what happens in the case where the man's father died. Who would *gani kini* on his behalf?

> ELDER 2: *'E, 'e, 'e* ['hold on']! That thought is deviating. This is not its moment.

> YOUNG MAN 1: You're entangling the talk. We have gone beyond the *kaidai*

['moment'] in our talk when that *kula* ['point'] you're asking about still retained its [epistemic] significance.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN: The different things that can happen that require different strategies are . . . .

(This new branch of the discussion then continues on variations in *gani kini'anga* and *alufafikini'anga*.)

Saefilongisi(a)

The epistemological strategy of interrogation is applied to an issue and also a piece of evidence put forth to support an argument. *Saefilongisi(a)* literally means 'question (it) to pieces'. Sometimes a piece will be set aside to be returned to later, if the sense of the meeting is that the current moment is not the right moment to discuss it or take it into consideration given where everyone is in the discourse (that is, the discursive branch), as in the last example. Great care is taken in critical discussions to systematically and thoroughly cover all aspects of an issue before moving on; issues will be returned to later if other realizations or discoveries come out of the evolving discussion. *Saefilongisi(a)* connotes the knowledge that a larger idea or point is made up of small pieces or parts, so that the entire process of discussion, debate, questioning, and analyzing of a given point together constitutes the whole. Arriving at the conclusion, answer, or understanding of something involves everyone's knowledge and does not reside with a single person. Hence, creating knowledge is dialogic.

In the following example, several elders are discussing a particular ritual in the ancestral religion and being interrogated by project members:

ELDER 1: Then the *fata bu* ['priest'] *fiki* ['cuts pork, and throws a piece at a time into the sacrificial fire, naming a subclan for each piece']. He cuts up the pork and each piece he throws into the fire and says, "This is your piece X [subclan name]."

YOUNG MAN 1: What if he makes a mistake during the *fiki'a* ['cutting of pork . . .']?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN: Yes. There are different *kula ki* ['places, points, perspectives within a whole discussion'] where he could make a mistake. For example, forgetting a clan name, or skipping over a subclan, or suddenly forgetting everything in a blank, or getting the subclans in the wrong order.

SEVERAL ELDERS: Someone will die.

YOUNG MAN 1: Do each of these mistakes mean death? Or would some mean only misfortune? Or illness or epidemic?

SEVERAL ELDERS: Only death.

ELDER 2: Those other misfortunes are foretold by mistakes made in other rituals, but not this one.

YOUNG MAN 2: Which part of the pig is offered to which subclan? For example, does a senior clan's portion come from a particular part of the pig or does it matter?

ELDER 2: Only the *fata bu* has the discretion over that. And he decides it at the moment of *fiki'a*.

YOUNG MAN 1: How does he make that decision?

(The questioning continues for many more exchanges before moving to the next action in the ritual sequence under discussion.)[10]

'Ini te'ete'e suli ru'anga

Among Kwara'ae terms for forms of reasoning used in enlightened dialogue, *'ini te'ete'e suli ru'anga* (literally, 'pinching little by little along a thing' or 'inch with the fingers along it') refers to systematic reasoning in laying out or evaluating a piece of evidence. The metaphor is drawn from gardening, where the end of a particular vine or root is located in a tangle of vines and roots by feeling along it carefully with the fingers. Metaphorically it refers to the epistemological strategy of locating truth or coming to a dependable conclusion by systematically reasoning through a tangle of evidence and possibilities. The metaphor applies not only to subtopics (or vines) within a topic, but also to branches—to reasoning that involves moving out from a source to wherever it is leading. Vines, of course, typically twist and turn, wind around themselves and each other, and may fork into one or more lesser vines. Thus, following a vine or branch does not imply a linear approach to evidence or logic. It does imply that a solution, answer, or decision can be reached. The metaphor also applies to the systematic consideration, one by one, of alternative interpretations. (For examples of this strategy in *fa'amanata'anga* and adapted for use in the classroom, respectively, see Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990, 1994.)

Related to the foregoing strategy and metaphor, someone who makes a strong point or argument that effectively brings a debate or dispute to an end may be described as *'ini musia* 'pinches it off', as in pinching back a growing vine or leaf bud to stop its growth, or *kwa'i musia* 'strikes it

off', implying a single slash with a machete, as when cutting through brush or vines.

Manata kali ru'anga

This strategy involves putting a given piece of evidence in the center and interrogating its context in concentric circles via question and answer, supporting evidence, and so on; translated literally, it is 'thinking around a thing'. With this strategy, questions evolve through dialogue or multilogue typically beginning with a narration or sometimes an explication. Direct questions are primarily used to challenge. *Manata kali ru'anga* is one strategy that gives discussion its seemingly circular but actually spiral form. To ask most questions of information, participating speakers build mini-narratives or descriptions, out of which a question is then posed. Such a strategy incorporates rather than distances interactants.

Didi suli ru'anga

Translated as 'the chipping along a thing to produce a design', this strategy is drawn from manufacturing stone tools in earlier times. It implies the careful chipping away with arguments one by one until a conclusion is reached. Here, the metaphor suggests that truth, knowledge, or decision involves many facets, each of which depends on the others for its angle and shape, but which together produce an integrated and useful design. The strategy is used in connection with interrogation, and comes closest to that form of justification in mainstream western epistemology based on propositional logic, as in "'S' knows that 'p' if and only if . . . ." In the following example, a man has been observed to *kelefa'i* 'spy on a woman' (like a peeping tom) a woman early in the morning when she was in her house preparing breakfast. The elder, a *kastom* judge, is interrogating the victim's husband, who said that a witness who saw the perpetrator in the act had reported it to him. (The village and the *kastom* judge are all members of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project.)

> ELDER: You, my son [the woman's husband] say you believe that Talu [the witness] saw Misi [the perpetrator] *kelefa'i* your wife. How can you *manata mamana* ['justify, believe, make true'] that what he told you was what happened?

> HUSBAND: I believe what he said to be true because when Talu saw Misi, he ran.

ELDER: Misi ran, but how do you know he ran because Talu saw him?

HUSBAND: Talu chased him and caught up with him. Talu *naea* ['accused him in a loud voice'] and they fought.

ELDER: And then what happened?

HUSBAND: Talu said that he went back and told my wife, "Did you know that Misi *kelefaʻi* you just now?" Then my wife *oʻomae* ['cry loudly, lamenting her defilement, by a woman'] and all the village came running out.

ELDER: What did Talu do then?

HUSBAND: He went and reported the incident to our village elders.

The *kastom* judge next questioned Talu. The husband spoke first because according to *falafala,* he has the right to speak first as his wife was defiled, and he had arranged for the case to be heard (*ngalia saena alaʻanga,* 'take [a person] to court'); in an Anglo-European court at least part of his testimony would be regarded as hearsay.

Faʻamamanaʻanga

Claims made in oral accounts are subjected to empirical assessment and verification. The question posed to elicit evidence is typically phrased as *"Tae neʻe faʻamamana kula neʻana?"* 'What is the evidence that supports the truth of your claim?' (literally, 'what [is it] that makes true that point'). Another strategy is to deny the truth of the claim—*"Nau ku ʻiri lisia mamanalana kula neʻana ʻoe saea"* 'I fail to see the truth of the point you are making'—and then offer counter evidence. The justification or evidential support for a claim may be provided in a variety of ways, including via landmarks or other physical evidence, other historical accounts, and from lived experience. With regard to the last, people ask, Does this argument sound sensible, given the experience of everyday life in Kwaraʻae (social or natural environment)? (The example offered for *didi suli ruʻanga* also illustrates *faʻamamanaʻanga.*)

Dialogic moment or turn

This phrase refers to the moment of intuitive understanding or flash of insight—epiphany—that pulls together previous talk into a coherent point and thereby turns the talk in a new direction or creates a new base of understanding for a higher or deeper level of discussion. It is both the moment in which intersubjectivity is formed, and the epitome of what is

meant by "enlightened dialogue." *Talingisilana ala'anga* is the process of critiquing, decoding, deconstructing, and reconstructing that results in this moment of nexus. No specific term in Kwara'ae labels the dialogic moment or turn, but the moment itself is recognized and referred to when it happens as *"Kula ne'eri ne'ana"* 'that's the place/part/portion/point [turn]'; *"Alu 'ira ana kwa!"* 'put it that way', in the sense of this phrasing or realization as the one to put forth from now on; *"Lia'a ne'ana kwa!"* 'that's the [way of] seeing'; and *"'Oe fa'amadakola nau"* 'you've just led me into the light [enlightened me]'. The last refers to seeing with the mind, that is, foresight, insight, or both.

   Critical discussion also contributes to linguistic change in Kwara'ae. In following the branches of topics and issues outward, discussants necessarily must consider the semantics of Kwara'ae lexical items, their semantic boundaries, and aspects of grammatical classes and morphology. Like English-speakers, Kwara'ae-speakers are highly flexible in borrowing and adapting words, adding new definitions to older words, streamlining morphologically complex words and phrases, turning nouns into verbs or verbs into nouns, expanding sets of terminologies, and so on. As we have shown elsewhere (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1990; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 1999), the Kwara'ae view language as social action, culture as anchored in language, and language and culture as *teo fiku* 'inseparable' and *ratai* 'inextricable'. When they engage in discourse, people use language to transform knowledge, ideas, and understanding, and in the process, language itself is also clarified and transformed. For example, the word *diflopmen* 'development' borrowed into Kwara'ae from English has undergone phonological and semantic changes, especially in its relationship to *bisnis* 'business' over the past several decades. Through philosophical discussion, in West Kwara'ae differing ways of pronouncing *diflopmen* are associated with different conceptualizations of "development." Moreover, *diflopmen* and *bisnis* do not directly map onto English semantics for these terms (see Gegeo 1998).

"How We Know": Indigenous Researchers Reflecting on Epistemology and Praxis

All of the project members speak enthusiastically about the transformations they have each experienced in the project in differing ways, and they are aware that as a younger generation, they are doing epistemology, that is, creating knowledge.

> For me, as a young man, the most important thing is that I have been learning about traditional culture. (Musia, about 35 years old)

> The project has given me the analytical skills to see who can be trusted and who cannot be trusted as far as cultural knowledge is concerned. ('Adoa, 47 years old)

> We are not only *fa'amauri* ['bring to life, revitalize'] culture that has been passed down to us, but we are actually engaged in *saunga'ilana sai'iru'anga* ['creating knowledge'] . . . . The project has given us the analytical skills to ask questions that probe deeper into culture. Every member of our project has experienced this *manata madakola'anga* ['enlightenment'; literally, 'think in light'] and *fa'angasingasi'anga* ['empowerment']. (Sale, 51 years old)

'Adoa goes on to say that the difference between one who really knows and one who pretends to know is that the former uses a deeper vocabulary in Kwara'ae, taking a given body of knowledge beyond the boundaries learned from the original knower, to expand on it. The imagery used for a truly knowledgeable person in this sense is *manata afe'ara'ara* 'mind that flows like a river or stream' versus for a pretending but less knowledgeable person, *olioli'a* 'whirlpool,' that is, repetitious and circling nowhere. 'Adoa's comment foregrounds the importance of the knower doing indigenous epistemology to create new knowledge and push the boundaries of knowing further. Project members often use the term *lia tau* 'see far'—always seeing the horizon at a distance and never reaching it. Knowledge is never captured in its entirety, its end being beyond reach. Epistemologically, the idea is that when the knower can see the horizon, it means that person can also see what lies between the knower and the horizon, and can therefore develop strategies to create knowledge. Cognitively, the person is said to be *manata 'ifi* 'mind open' to understanding. People say that they can feel the open-mindedness in the body, although epistemologically, *manata 'ifi'anga* 'the mind being open' comes under *lisi ru'anga* 'seeing things'.

Following on Sale's comment, project members spoke of how up to this point, cultural knowledge had been passed down orally, and it was unclear to them how it was constructed. Now they feel they are in the place of the elders, and they must be, as they are the generation to continue the knowledge and to continue to construct it. They have come to the acceptance of this responsibility as indigenous epistemologists. They see the epistemic mantle, so to speak, as passing to their generation.

One important issue project members have raised on their letter-tapes

is the local tendency to turn to outside knowledge for solving internal problems.

> One of the reasons nobody here has been willing to *fa'amauria falafala* ['bring traditional culture back to life'] is because the majority of Kwara'ae people these days *manatalada nia 'i ma* ['their thinking is outside'] of their culture. They depend on outside knowledge to solve their problems instead of looking inward and seeing how they can solve these same problems using our own indigenous knowledge. They chase things that come from outside, which makes them more dependent on knowledge from outside. It is the knowledge we have acquired about Kwara'ae culture and social issues more generally that has made us willing to continue with this project . . . . [W]e have tried all kinds of [development] projects and nothing meaningful has come out of them. These things come and go, whereas the KGP involves something that has to do with our *to'of na tua'a* ['essence of being/ontology']. . . . Other Kwara'ae people have not actually tried to do the work despite a lot of talking about the need to *fa'amauria falafala* and analyze our culture. They haven't because it is difficult work. Difficult not only because of the time involved, but creating knowledge itself is difficult work. (Sale)

Like Sale, other project members commented on the hard work involved in doing epistemology, and the insights about the significance of indigenous versus Anglo-European epistemology for their lives. Each of them talked about the frustration arising when elders, chiefs, and other indigenous leaders seemed intimidated by outsiders, government and church officials, and development specialists who came to villages to hold workshops or meetings. The elders were silent, embarrassed, and sometimes acted "like children." They often acquiesced to what the outsiders said because, through colonization, they had been told that their indigenous knowledges and cultures were primitive and worthless. Project members went on to say that they themselves got the same negative messages about indigenous knowledge in school, from both outsider and indigenous Solomon Islands teachers. As a result, when they themselves became adults, they found that they, too, sometimes behaved like the elders and chiefs. Yet, they pointed out, when villagers themselves hold meetings, the same elders and the same project members demonstrate profound knowledge and have a strong command of rational discourse. "We began to think, if our knowledge has no value, why do researchers come and study us? There must be something behind it. We said, 'Let's find out.' Through this project we now know that our ways of creating knowledge are just as good as those of the outsiders" (Sale).

For the many project members, participation in the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project has revolutionized how they behave when outsiders come to their villages. The project villages have gained the reputation of being "a bunch of watchdogs" to be avoided by election campaigners, workshop sponsors, and other outsiders because they challenge the assumptions in what these outsiders say and do. Project members notice that both outsiders and school-educated Solomon Islanders cannot handle the rigorous way in which they subject ideas to intense questioning and other strategies of indigenous epistemology.

Not only during workshops and meetings held by outsiders, on issues to do with modernization, development, or church, do project members' abilities in critiquing and reformulating ideas and issues from the standpoint of indigenous epistemology become apparent. In traditional meetings and court cases, they have become significant voices. Leka, an older member of the project and an elected *kastom* chief, described how work in the project has helped him in passing verdicts and making decisions in court cases.

> Recently other *kastom* chiefs have marveled at what they see as my ability to argue in court cases over land. I'm able to see subtleties in issues that I used not to see, and that sometimes even the elder chiefs do not see. These comments have been made by some of the chiefs who have had primary education in mission schools. Some chiefs who didn't know about my background asked me where I had gone to school. I always tell them that I went to a local village school, and left after the first year. But it's not whiteman's schooling where I learned how to see issues at this much deeper level. It was through the project and returning to *kastom* ways of knowing and reasoning [indigenous epistemology], what we have in our own culture. It's not only what we have done in the project, however, that has made me think more deeply. It's the confidence I've gained and the respect for traditional knowledge—that our strategies for argumentation are just as important if not more important than those of whiteman's schooling. I see other chiefs arguing in local courts along the lines of whiteman's law and ways of thinking. They cannot do it, and it only leads to confusion and passing judgments that are unfair. I see now that outsiders' ways of reasoning and whiteman's law won't fit our oral traditions of land. In tradition, land rights are based on genealogy. And genealogy in our culture is the *fuli* ['foundation'] of life and *manata saga'anga* ['straight reasoning']. (Leka, 54 years old)

KGP members are also thinking critically about the indigenous epistemological strategies they use in constructing knowledge. In the context of a

meeting, when a particular strategy doesn't seem to elicit the knowledge they are seeking or sends the talk along an unhelpful trajectory, project members on the spot or in a separate meeting will discuss why this is the case. One issue is whether the strategy used might be inappropriate for eliciting the type of information they are at that moment seeking. Another issue is whether something in the strategy itself needs reformulation. Such discussions can be lengthy, and have led the group into broader critiques of indigenous epistemology itself. As a result, when they attend area meetings or court hearings, they have become experts at analyzing presentation of evidence, quality of evidence, the logic of argumentation, the strategies for eliciting testimony or position statements, and the organization of talk toward decisions. Again, the underlying shape of the Kwara'ae indigenous epistemological process is not linear, but involves the articulation, disarticulation, and rearticulation of evidence in a complex, multiple process. It is especially in the rearticulation of evidence and information that dialogic moments of epiphany occur.

The Argument for Alternative Epistemologies

Increasing globalization, identity hybridization, development, and ethnic diaspora have challenged Anglo-European epistemology's dominance and pretense to solutions for all social problems. The Kwara'ae Genealogy Project is but one example of the diversity of epistemologies through which situated problems are and can be addressed, along the lines of standpoint epistemology (Hartsock 1983), that is, marginalized peoples producing socially situated knowledge that addresses local problems, using their indigenous epistemologies.

As argued earlier, one of the primary reasons members of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project began doing the project was their disillusionment with the many failed development projects based on Anglo-European assumptions and knowledge. They and other villagers have experienced what seemed to them the bombardment of rural villages with workshops and other interventions intended to explain to them why development projects failed or how to do projects successfully. Yet everything presented to them started from the assumption that there was something wrong about their lives that needed improving, and that traditional culture was somehow to blame for failure and certainly not part of the solution. They have asked, "Why do these outsiders want us to improve along the lines of development that has already failed? What if our traditional culture can actually

help us?" KGP members stated that a major part of their motivation for the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project was to show that "There's nothing wrong with the life we're living based in traditional culture," and that life is one of *'inoto'a'anga* 'dignity', stability, peace, and other important Kwara'ae cultural values. They also have argued, "If our life is so bad, why do our 'important people' in government and business return to the village when they retire, and say that they feel freedom here, that they are finding their *kula ni fuli* ['place/source/foundation']." In making these arguments, villagers in the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project are necessarily making their case along the lines of standpoint epistemology, as well as the case for using their indigenous strategies to construct knowledge (*sa'i ru'anga kami,* or *liato'o'anga kami,* 'our ways of knowing/seeing, ie, creating knowledge') to respond to the impact of ill-conceived development and the loss of valuable cultural knowledge.

Of course members of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project have never heard of standpoint epistemology. Their sources are indigenous. The integrity of their work is respected locally because their own parents and the elders involved in project meetings were socialized in and continue to adhere to traditional culture in fundamental ways. Many of the elders migrated to the coast after the Second World War, and some elders involved in the project never converted to Christianity.

As we have mentioned, the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project is not unique; such projects are going on worldwide. However, there is a great need in the Pacific Islands for Native Pacific Islander scholars to become involved in research on their indigenous or native epistemology(ies). Ironically, when Pacific Islander scholars attempt to write about or do research on their indigenous knowledge, what they produce is often criticized by outside researchers as contaminated by their Anglo-European scholarly training. (And when they write using the conventions and discursive practices of Anglo-European scholarship, they are equally criticized for not having mastered the techniques or the literature!) As a comparatively new community of scholars, we Pacific Islanders must not allow ourselves to be discouraged by these criticisms. Our goal instead should be to steep ourselves in Anglo-European scholarship in order to transcend it in the interest of opening up spaces for historically silenced Pacific epistemologies and cultural knowledges.

*   *   *

Notes

1 Dehegemonization refers to attempting to undo the already established hegemony. Hegemony in the Gramscian sense is "the legitimation of the cultural authority of the dominant group, an authority that plays a significant role in social reproduction" (Woolard 1985, 739). With Woolard, we take the problem of hegemony to be "the problem of authority and collaboration or consent, in contrast to domination and coercion [eg colonization], in the maintenance of a particular social formation." Hegemony begins with coercion and domination (colonialism), then becomes internalized, essentially self-perpetuating, and largely unquestioned. Foucault (1980, 1984) refers to it as "normalization." An example is third-world countries buying into western schooling and modernization, "imitating Western ideas, consumption patterns, and social relationships" (Nyerere and others 1990, 46), so that even the imitation is accepted as the normal and preferable pattern of behavior.

2 Several years ago when we presented an earlier paper involving indigenous epistemology at an international conference, a very senior Pacific anthropologist told us privately that he had never witnessed philosophical discussions of the kind we were describing and did not believe they take place in any Pacific society. Despite a high level of fluency in the Pacific language he had studied for decades, he had never been able to elicit from informants a philosophical vocabulary of the kind we describe in Kwara'ae. We think that the problem here lies not with indigenous Pacific cultural practices, but with the way outside researchers do their work. Later in the paper we briefly allude to what rural villagers themselves say about research strategies.

3 See Brush and Stabinsky 1996; Chapman 1995; Connerton 1989; Falgout 1992; Gegeo 1998; Hobart 1993; Keck 1998; Lambek 1983; Long and Long 1992; Nader 1996; Pieterse and Parekh 1995; Rosaldo 1980; Warren, Slikkerveer, and Brokensha 1995; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992.

4 For example, Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Clifford 1988; and especially in early issues on reinventing culture in this journal (volumes 1 and 2).

5 Other factors have included rapid culture and life-circumstance changes that have stimulated some disadvantaged by these changes to collect or reconstruct

oral accounts of clan or subclan history and cultural knowledge, in order to bolster their claims to major resources (land, etc).

6 See also Ayer 1959; for a detailed discussion of subjectivity and objectivity in relation to the knower, see Code 1993.

7 Villagers' comments help explain why *kastom* as published by outside researchers is an anthropological reconstruction and reinterpretation: the epistemological strategies being Anglo-European, even the answers given by interviewees are distorted, and of course the theoretical frameworks used are also Anglo-European. The issues are therefore very complex in relation to theory, method, epistemology, and inferential frameworks.

8 So far there have been no overt challenges to the knowledge constructed by the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project, in terms of competing versions other than those we allude to that arise in the context of discussion and recording and are expected in the application of epistemological verification strategies. However, the existence of the project itself has been challenged. Occasionally when project members have gone to particular villages to interview certain elders with whom they had prior agreements, the elders' sons have opposed their fathers' participation. Here a generational gap is revealed, in that during the ensuing argument between fathers and sons, the elders have emphasized their fear that traditional knowledge is being lost because their sons either are not interested in it or lack skills to record it. These elders often point to other well-known men and women elders who have already died, taking their knowledge with them. In turn, the sons have expressed suspicion that the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project wants to make money for themselves by publishing the elders' knowledge. However, project members are not interested in making money. Some of the men in the project have been challenged by family members for spending so much time on work that their families do not see as adding to family income. These family members complain that project members are neglecting "development" projects and family responsibilities. Nevertheless, the challenges to the project from within and without have been remarkably few compared to the support that most people in the area have given to it. Members of the older generation who are regarded as especially knowledgeable support the project in large numbers and attend the meetings in force.

9 The project was begun by men and continues to be a primarily male project. Women attend the meetings, but so far have not taken an active role. This is partly because women who married in from genealogical groups other than those included in the project are understandably less interested in the project goal of recording genealogy of groups to which they themselves do not belong, although they do attend meetings that focus on other cultural topics. Women of the Liana clan, who typically have married out into villages at some distance from those involved in the project, have been consulted about issues of genealogy and cultural knowledge.

10 A major problem in rendering the discourse examples here in English is that to make them understandable to a native English speaker, Kwaraʻae ways of expressing subtleties of meaning and reasoning strategies are lost in translation. Thus to some, the *saefilongisi(a)* example may seem similar to anthropological interviewing. As asked in high rhetoric, however, using indigenous ways of thinking, discussants moved to meta-levels of meaning in the ritual on which they focused, and the elders revealed a very rich set of terms for concepts associated with the ritual that are normally secret.

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Abstract

We examine Kwara'ae (Solomon Islands) indigenous epistemology and indigenous critical praxis, including sources of knowledge and strategies for validating and critiquing evidence and knowledge construction. To illustrate indigenous epistemology in action, we focus on the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project, a research effort by rural villagers aimed at creating an indigenous written account of Kwara'ae culture. In recording, (re)constructing, and writing Kwara'ae culture, project members are not only doing indigenous epistemology, but also reflecting on and critiquing their own indigenous strategies for knowledge creation. We hope that the work illustrated here will inspire other Native Pacific Islander scholars to carry out research on their native or indigenous epistemologies.

KEYWORDS: indigenous epistemology, indigenous critical praxis, Kwara'ae, Solomon Islands, villagers conducting research