A PLACE-BASED CONSIDERATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: RECREATING FIJIAN LANDSCAPES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI’I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
IN GEOGRAPHY

DECEMBER 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who made this thesis possible.

To my academic advisor and committee chair Professor Jonathan Goss and committee members Professors Mary McDonald and Krisnawati Suryanata; thank you for your guidance, patience, and encouragement. My gratitude also goes to the East West Center for funding my studies at the University of Hawaii and this research. Gene Vricella, my scholarship officer at the East West Center, thank you for your support and enduring friendship. Amelia Makutu and other former colleagues at WWF-South Pacific, interview respondents, and Navakasobu village, thank you for gifting me your time. This thesis would not have been completed without your contributions and I am truly grateful to you.

To Joe, thank you for your endless encouragement, unwavering support, and boundless patience, I could not have done it without you.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

WWF  Formerly known as the World Wildlife Fund and World Wide Fund for Nature, the organization has since 2001 been known simply as WWF

CBNRM  Community Based Natural Resource Management

WWF-SPPO  WWF South Pacific Program

FIME  Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion, an initiative of WWF-SPPO implemented in Fiji, which focuses on conserving Fiji’s marine biodiversity

IUCN  International Union for Conservation of Nature

UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

VANTAGES, ADVANTAGES, PRIVILEGE AND SEEING

The two countries that I have called home, Sri Lanka and Fiji, are both beset by ethnic strife. Colonial importations of ethnic Indian labor in both countries, in Sri Lanka to provide labor for the tea industry, and in Fiji for the production of sugar, has left both of my homelands in spasms of turmoil as each of these nations struggle to deal with multicultural conflict. One of my earliest childhood memories is riding back-to-front on my father’s motorcycle watching Tamil-owned market stalls being gutted and set ablaze by Sinhalese ethno-nationalists during Sri Lanka’s civil insurgency in 1983. I was supposed have my face against my father’s chest so that I would not see the atrocities that were being committed, but I was five years old and not very good at following instructions. I saw, and I was ashamed of being Sinhalese. That was the beginning of my life-long revulsion for ethno-nationalism.

Moving to Fiji as a teenager I was faced with another confrontation with ethno-nationalism. From my perch as a privileged ‘Other’¹, I watched my ‘Indian’ classmates, who for all matters of purpose looked like me, being mocked for their ethnicity by my ‘Fijian’ classmates. I watched with dismay as poor Indo-Fijian sugarcane farmers were extorted by indigenous landowners for ‘goodwill payments’ during lease renewal negotiations. I watched with hope as Fiji constructed and enacted a new constitution in 1999 which came as close to Fiji has ever been in turning its back on the ethno-nationalism that had dominated its post-independence political sphere. That hope was short-lived.

¹ In the Electoral roll and for all other official state purposes, the citizenry of Fiji are divided along ethnic lines into three major categories, Fijian and Rotuman (the indigenous population), Indian or Indo-Fijian, and Others. The last group is made up of recent migrants of non-Indian origin, such as myself and other migrant communities including the Chinese (both recent and historic) and Part-Europeans (those who have a, often paternal, Caucasian parent or ancestor).
When I decided to become an environmental practitioner in the non-profit sector I thought I had found a sound refuge from ethnic tensions and considerations. My rosy image of the international environmental non-profit was a cross between 1960’s style flower-power and an UN-inspired global citizenry. It soon became apparent that social and political struggle enter, inform, and fashion the international environment non-profit scene as much as any other facet of the socio-economic spectrum. In my tenure at WWF-South Pacific Programme, where I spent some time designing products to inform South Pacific audiences on how climate change will affect their immediate lives and the lives of future generations, and coordinating the WWF-South Pacific Climate Change programme, I became aware of how much race, place, and politics affects how the organization carries out its program. As I had in high school, at WWF I had a privileged position, I was neither ‘Indian’ nor ‘Fijian’ and so in a way I was an outsider, but in an organization that at the time had a significant proportion of expatriate staff, I was from Fiji, and so I was an insider. Perhaps in a way I was at the threshold of insider/outsider, at once both and neither – a privileged vantage point with which to observe the ethnic drama of Fiji and WWF-South Pacific unfold – without too much threat to myself.

**LOCALS WITH PROBLEMS, INTERNATIONALS WITH SOLUTIONS – ISSUES OF RELEVANCE AND COMPATIBILITY**

According to advocates of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), this framework is not only a tool for natural resource management but also a vehicle for social justice that holds promise of empowering ‘local communities.’ However, the loosely-defined nature of the term “community” in CBNRM allows practitioners immense flexibility in its use. In the context of a society such as Fiji’s, where ‘belonging’ and citizenship, and hence meanings associated with community are deeply divided and differentiated by ethnicity, CBNRM becomes embroiled in processes and politics of inclusion and exclusion.

The multi-scalar nature of CBNRM, designed and funded by western conservation organizations, and implemented by national offices and field staff in local settings, often results in CBNRM being situated in a variety of international, national, and local discourses. Many non-profit sector personnel, both local and foreign, have had exposure
to indigenous issues of rights over natural resources framed in the context of international indigenous rights discourse, which has stemmed from the struggles of indigenous peoples’ in asserting their rights from states. For examples of such discourse refer to (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1997) and high-profile international indigenous rights issues in (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, n.d.). Important considerations for CBNRM and its practitioners in Fiji are: How does Fiji’s situation compare with these familiar examples of peoples’ interactions with their natural, social, and economic environment? What national discourses and debates affect CBRNM and *vice versa*?

CBNRM is by necessity and design not simply a tool for conservation, or even for socially-conscious conservation. CBNRM is a methodology that holds promise of balancing the field between marginalized local people and powerful institutions and processes, whether they be the state or market forces and private interests (or an alliance of the two). CBNRM in Fiji then requires by necessity to examine and address existing economic and social marginalities articulated in Fiji peoples’ interactions with their natural environment so as to deliver more equitable environmental and social situations. This requires examination of the contested environmental, social, economic, and political terrain that CBNRM straddles, at the many scales at which CBNRM is articulated by and in.

In order to better understand the success of CBNRM as a vehicle for social justice, analysis must consider the particularities of place. Pre-conceived generalizations on marginality, indigeneity, and natural resource management may not always be applicable in the local context. In the case of Fiji where this research is situated, the natural environment is a heavily contested terrain. Indigenous Fijians have control of over eighty percent of Fiji’s land and effectively the entirety of Fiji’s inshore waters. Fiji’s citizenry, however, includes a significant non-indigenous segment - primarily Indian settlers who were brought to the islands over a century ago to provide labor for sugarcane plantations in the colonial era. In the late 20th century, international non-governmental organizations such as WWF came to Fiji with the aim of preserving the country’s rich natural heritage. At this time, CBNRM was the favored paradigm in international conservation circles and
thus CBNRM and ‘participatory approaches’ were widely adopted and recommended by WWF-South Pacific,² their allies, and their peers. In the context of Fiji, participatory approaches to resource management had the potential to provide a space in which dialogue could take place between ethnically-determined resource owners and resource users and become a platform for inter-ethnic dialogue on resource distribution in rural Fiji. This thesis uncovers the failures of CBNRM, as practiced in Fiji, in achieving this high ideal.

**OBJECTIVES OF THIS THESIS**

This thesis focuses on three community-centered initiatives in Fiji undertaken by WWF-South Pacific Programme Office (WWF-SPPO), to examine how this organization’s CBNRM efforts challenge or reinforce meanings of marginality, community and identity in Fiji. It examines existing state-constructed imaginings of national belonging and marginality in Fiji and how these identities and meanings have been reproduced through contemporary international conservation discourse. This analysis demonstrates how current CBNRM generally reinforces existing inequitable constructions of belonging in, ownership of, and marginality in, Fiji’s landscape.

**OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

The remainder of this thesis is organized into four chapters. Chapter Two provides the theoretical and literature background for this thesis. In this chapter I discuss the evolution of dominant environmental thought from the era of national parks and the attendant view that people and wild nature were mutually exclusive categories to CBNRM, which considers people as central to effectively managing and conserving natural resources. I then go on to discuss the particular imaginings of communities that are prevalent in CBNRM and some notable critiques of these imaginings. Chapter Two also discusses state production of belonging, marginality and deserving beneficiaries and how these constructions have real implications for rural people in Fiji through analyzing

² WWF was formerly known as World Wildlife Fund and later the Worldwide Fund for Nature. Since 2001 it has simply been known as WWF. Branch offices are designated location names, for example, in the Pacific WWF operates through WWF-South Pacific etc.
newspaper reports of state response to a flooding event in 2004. Chapter Three describes the methodology utilized in this thesis to unpack how CBNRM challenges and re/produces marginality in Fiji’s rural landscape. The discourse analysis-led methodology uses data gained from archival research both online and at the WWF office in Suva and also data gathered through ethnographic techniques. Chapter Four analyses key WWF-CBNRM communications material for three projects: Climate Witness, Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion (FIME), and the *kuta* project. These materials project very particular images of community. This chapter also discusses how these constructions have real consequences for rural people in Fiji insofar as receiving benefits from CBNRM projects. In the concluding chapter I consider how WWF-CBNRM projects in Fiji have reproduced the marginalities prevalent in Fiji’s state discourse.

This thesis is an attempt to analyze the nature of the interaction of people, politics and nature in one office of an international non-profit. This thesis is by no means an effort to devalue the considerable successes and contributions of WWF-South Pacific in Fiji nor a call to abandon CBNRM, a paradigm that has brought immense positive change in how conservation organizations and the world at large view rural populations that have controlled, manipulated, and nurtured their natural resources often for time immemorial. This thesis is an attempt at shedding light on how the particularities of place, in this case Fiji, play out in one context of environmental conservation as it is practiced at the dawn of the 21st century. Conservation, after all, is *carried out in place*, and it is in this place that conservation must reach an arrangement, and agreement, with people.
CHAPTER 2. INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION DISCOURSE, COMMUNITY, AND FIJI’S NATIONAL DISCOURSE ON CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING

By the close of the 19th century the need for protecting nature by way of restrictions on the use of natural resources such as forests and waterways had become obvious. In response, the earliest state-enforced nature reserves, in the form of National Parks, made an appearance in Europe and America (Chatty, 2003; Lowry, 2003; Neumann, 2004). Through the ensuing century the National Parks model of state-centered conservation was replicated in other countries as well, first by colonial administrators and then by national governments. For examples of this see Adams, 2003; Novellino, 2003; Nygren, 2003; Becker, 2001.

From the earliest days, civil society was a driving force behind nature conservation. In North America, individuals such as John Muir and his organization, the Sierra Club, were among the first to successfully lobby the United States government to legislate areas for recreational, educational, and conservation purposes (Sierra Club, 2011). The twentieth century saw the establishment of a plethora of similar organizations including Ecologists Union (later the Nature Conservancy), The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and World Wildlife Fund (later WWF). While the particular goals of each organization differed, most invoked preserving wild nature for the enjoyment of current and future generations as justification for the setting up of national parks.

National parks were implemented in ‘wilderness areas’ or areas considered as “untamed nature” (Castree, 2000). Wrongly, such areas were at times considered as devoid of human occupation (Adams cited in Neumann, 2004) and at others as people and nature conservation being irreconcilable. Buttressed by theories such as Garret Hardin’s tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968), local people were, as Agrawal and Gibson (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001, p. 4) point out, wrongly depicted as uninformed, irrational and
unrestrained users of natural resources such as forests, wildlife, fisheries, and pastures to meet their own needs. The solution to this problem was the exclusion of local people from areas demarcated as worthy of conservation, sometimes even with the use of violent force (for examples see Nygren, 2003). What resulted were local people losing access to (sometimes ancestral) lands and livelihoods (Becker L., 2001, p. 508; Adams, 2003, p. 19; Nygren, 2003, p. 36). The former residents of the ‘national park’ areas now became illegal squatters, former users of resources became thieves (Adams, 2003, pp. 1,2; Nygren, 2003, p. 36; Novellino, 2003, p. 183). Agrawal and Gibson (2001, p. 5) attributed failure of coercive state-centered conservation in part to its inability to recognize and address the needs of the residents of ‘wilderness areas’ exacerbated by a host of administrative and design flaws.

The failure of fortress-type conservation in delivering the desired conservation outcomes gave way to a new thinking that incorporated community (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001, p. 5; Tsing, Brosius, & Zerner, 2005, p. 1; Li, 2002, p. 1). This shift in thinking began to take hold in the 1970s when the failure of coercive conservation was becoming apparent, scholarship on common property resources was starting to gain momentum, and a push toward democratic and participatory approaches was taking hold (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001). By the 1990s community based management had become a conservation strategy recognized by nearly all international players in the field of natural resource management, including funding agencies (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001, p. 4; Tsing, Brosius, & Zerner, 2005, p. 2; Coward, 2005). For example, the Social Development Family at the World Bank said that “[w]hen properly designed, community-based programs can be highly effective in managing natural resources…” (Narayan D., 1997). In a similar trend, the Ford Foundation too has supported communities, most recently through its Sustainable Development program. One initiative of this program specifically focuses on improving community rights to natural resources (Ford Foundation, 2013). ‘Communities’ were assumed to have a vested interest in managing their resources sustainably, because living in close proximity to their resources they had an intimate knowledge of the environment and ecosystems in which they lived, and they often had norms and institutions developed over the millennia to protect them (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001, pp. 5-7; Tsing, Brosius, & Zerner, 2005). As critiqued by Li (2002, p. 265),
advocates of CBNRM claim that the paradigm tries to achieve social justice goals by “return[ing] to communities the right to control their resources and their futures”.

**CBNRM AND IDENTITY**

In introducing their 2001 edited volume, Agrawal and Gibson (2001) summed up the dominant view of community held by advocates of CBNRM: that communities are small, fixed spatial units, homogenous in social structure, and having shared interests and common norms. They correctly pointed out that this particular conceptualization of community is problematic to management of fugitive resources, is unable to include nomadic communities, ignores the effects of resource exploitative common norms and also ignores important socioeconomic differentials that exist within any group. These considerations led Agrawal and Gibson (2001) to suggest an alternative framework for analyzing community based on actors, processes, and institutions. In their alternative framework, Agrawal and Gibson (2001) presented community as made up of multiple actors with different interests and differential status. In this framework the processes through which these actors interrelate and influence decisions about resources requires the study of not only local-level phenomena but also larger processes at play outside the community (*Ibid*, p. 13). Further, the institutions, that is norms and rules that facilitate these interactions and decision-making process, also need to be analyzed in order to better conceptualize community (*Ibid*, pp. 14,15). They highlight ethnicity, gender, and community-state relations as issues that require particular attention in such analysis (*Ibid*, p. 15).

Murti and Boydell’s (2008) work in Fiji on two forestry initiatives followed a framework similar to the suggestions of Agrawal and Gibson. This research considered two CBNRM projects that had been implemented in two forests to manage and conserve the natural resource. Murti and Boydell’s (2008) work highlighted that communities rarely have a consensus on their expectations of exploiting and governing their natural resources. A clearer understanding and consideration of the very particular nature of land and natural resource ownership in Fiji in general, the project area in particular and the
varying economic and social positions of actors within the fold of community could have eventuated in more successful project outcomes (*Ibid*).

In the above conceptualizations, community is *a priori*. It is *within* a unified, unitary community that actors have differential interests and status, and that actors claim resources and engage with institutions that negotiate and mediate these claims. The emphasis of such an analysis is on those who are already *within* the fold of community. There is a gap between this type of analysis of community and the following critique of community by researchers such as McDermott (2001) who consider insider/outsider concepts in CBNRM. In the case of Fiji, I find the framework of insiders/outsiders to be particularly salient.

McDermott’s (2001) work on the Palawan islands, Philippines, discusses the role of the state in “creating” community. Her research describes how prior to legislative initiatives to recognize ‘indigenous communities’ the indigenous peoples of Palawan did not articulate themselves as the archetypical community. However, once the state put in place legislation to recognize indigenous communities and provide these groups with access to albeit degraded upland land, local people adapted their histories to fit the model of community in legislation to legitimize their rights to natural resources in the area and to establish their claims for resources over migrants (*Ibid*).

In a similar work, Sundberg (2004, p. 43) considers how “conservation in the making is constitutive of *identities-in-the-making*” in a women’s traditional medicine CBNRM/small business project in the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala. The project eventually led to the development of two factions of women in the village, those who created new gender roles for themselves by maintaining the project as a ‘women’s project’ and those who joined an alternative male-led group (Sundberg, 2004). In addition, the project produced a new ethnicized identity in the village because a male village elder who had had prior experience with working with non-profits “underst[ood] the cachet of all things indigenous within environmental non-profits…” (*Ibid*, p. 51). Using this knowledge he advised the women that “to be attractive to and compatible with
NGO visions of authentic indigenous women then they must emphasize the naturalness of their traditions,” (*Ibid*).

Li (2004) highlights a similar example in her work in central Sulawesi, Indonesia where a group of rural people mobilized their ‘indigenous’ identity in order to oppose the construction of a hydroelectric dam planned by the state. In this example, the rural population of Lindu worked with their non-profit allies in articulating their ‘indigenous’ culture in terms that were familiar to outsiders, an articulation that, among other things, involved casting a green gaze on the Lindu’s relationships with their natural resources.

All of these works highlight how rural populations framed and articulated their identities in order to either take benefit from opportunities or avoid unwelcome development. In this process of articulation and construction, these groups drew on what they knew to be markers of authenticity, claim to entitlement and, the pre-conceived images of ‘community’ held by the outside audiences they were trying to persuade; and this involved claiming an exceptional relationship with nature that ‘outsiders’ did not have.

From early on, indigeneity was closely related to community in CBNRM. In analyzing the role of indigeneity in conservation, Latour’s concept of the immutable mobile, that is “socially defined objects, representations, or processes that are considered the same in different locations of cultural settings… adopted by both experts and the public as unquestioned representation of reality, regardless of local experience,” (Latour cited in Forsyth, 2003, p. 177) becomes useful. As Li rightly points out, advocates have framed and accept indigenous groups as “naturally bounded, culturally distinct groups occupying spatially continuous and usually remote terrain” (Li T. M., 2004, p. 347), an image that is uncannily similar to the image of community critiqued by Agrawal and Gibson (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001). Because of this conflation in CBNRM discourse, groups who wish to claim rights through CBNRM have subsequently positioned and articulated their claims through indigeneity, thereby reproducing the conflation of indigeneity and community. McDermott’s work in the Palawan Islands, and the village elder in Sunderberg’s work are illustrative of this point.
In addition to elucidating how can articulate themselves through the indigenous slot to cease upon opportunities presented through CBNRM, Li’s work in central Sulawesi (Li, 2004) also provides an example of the problem of conflating community with a certain image of indigeneity. In comparing the Lindu to the rural population of the Lauje hills she highlights how indigeneity can be used for negotiation of claims over resources. Although both groups are indigenous the former used “the indigenous slot” to gain legitimacy while the latter, a more diffuse group both geographically and institutionally, was unable to do so (Ibid).

In a similar scenario in the Amazon, Balanos (Balanos, 2011) describes how local people positioned themselves in the “indigenous slot” to claim rights to Amazonian land from the state and recently-arrived soybean producers. What was most interesting in this case was that those claiming indigenous status were in fact of mixed Amazonian-Indian, African, and European descent, but they recognized that, unlike in the case of being local, in indigeneity lay a power that could contend with the power of the state and large-scale agriculture. At the same time environmental conservation groups including Greenpeace, pursuing a conservation agenda were also in conflict with the state and agriculture (Ibid). The ‘indigenous’ groups and the environmental conservation groups formed a brief alliance, which was dissolved when the social activists felt that the environmental activists were not giving adequate support and sympathy to land-rights issues (Ibid).

Both these examples have a particular salience to Fiji, where although most ‘local’ people have a long place-based history, not all local people are, or have the opportunity, to position themselves as indigenous.

The term community is used loosely and its definition left implicit not only in CBNRM, but also in academic and common usage (Stacey 1969 cited in Johnson, 2000, p. 101). Many understandings of the term involve tradition (Schmalenback 1961 cited in Johnson, 2000, p. 101), following from Tönnies’ concept of **gemeinschaft** (cited in Johnson, 2000, p. 101), and romantic notions of organized, closely knit rural groups of people (Johnson, 2000, p. 101). Given that many conservationists are educated, middle-class urbanites disenchanted with modernization, industrialization, and urbanization (Forsyth, 2003, pp. 107-8), there is little surprise that their framing of community, the quintessential ‘other’,
follows romantic notions of stable, homogenous and closely-knit groups. As a result, from the advent, CBNRM’s ‘community’ was a term loaded with meaning leaning towards a particular imagining of community rather than a definition open to interpretation at each local context.

Many critiques of CBNRM, including that by Agrawal and Gibson (2001), focus more on the treatment of community by CBNRM. The changes that are called for by such critiques are to consider a more diverse range of groups such as nomadic groups and diffuse populations in designing CBNRM. In places such as Fiji, where local perceptions of community are often based on ethnic difference, the critique of CBNRM needs to go further. For the type of critique required for Fiji, the work of authors such as McDermott (2001), Sundberg (2004), Li (2004) and Balanos (2011) become more useful.

Considerations of CBNRM producing new and/or reproducing existing identities and inequities are salient in places such as Fiji where resource owners and resource users are primarily determined along ethnic lines. The potential of CBNRM for legitimizing the identities and claims of one group as resource owners/managers over those of another as resource users is problematic and deserves greater attention.

**STRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS IN CBNRM**

CBNRM projects implemented by international non-profits in the third world are represented most often by local field-staff. These staff members, fluent in the language of environmentalism and conservation also represent local interests, agendas, and alliances which they are able to articulate through the spaces created by CBNRM. The impact of local staff on CBNRM becomes apparent in the situating of projects, in the stakeholders considered, and in the mechanisms used to implement projects.

International non-profits operate within sovereign nations, which make national governments powerful players in their day to day running. The organization is dependent on the national government for granting of visas to foreign staff-members, and also for the mechanisms such as Memorandum of Understanding which allow the organization to operate within the country, granting it status as a non-profit and allowing tax benefits. As a result, although international non-profits declare political neutrality, in practice, few are
willing or in a position to vocally challenge national governments. In the case of WWF, its mission of “working with governments” (WWF South Pacific, 2005a) further constrains the organization’s ability to challenge the state.

Obtaining and maintaining access to the resources that are to be conserved further regulate international non-profits ‘speech’. The mechanisms available to gain access to resources and sites deemed worthy of conservation depend upon the particular resource tenure systems. In the case of Fiji, fee simple ownership is not dominant and natural resources are held communally, so international non-profits require the goodwill of the state, local institutions such as landholding units, and other regulating institutions. To enable expedient access to natural resources, non-profit staff must be well-versed in these local particularities and the mechanisms and protocols of these institutions. As a result, international non-profits tend to hire local professionals who have ties to government, often themselves having been in the civil service, or who are well-connected in local society by way of chiefly status, or having connections to strategic landholding units. These staff members are, in other words, part of the educated local elite. Given their status as local elite, these staff members have an interest in keeping the status quo, thus inhibiting the international non-profits’ ability to challenge local power structures.

Third world environmental activism since the 1970s has been as much a critique and response to top-down capitalist modes of development as it has been about protecting the environment. However, these two agendas are not always complementary. Rangan (2004) provides a good example in her research on the Chipko movement in Himalayan India, which rose out of local people becoming dissatisfied with their lack of opportunities for economic development exploiting their local resources (Rangan, 2004). The Chipko alliance involved activists from across the spectrum, local activists who wanted to better the economic lot of local people to environmentalists who wanted to protect the Himalayan forests. The original protest action of all activists—“hugging trees” to disable “outsiders” from harvesting the forest—resulted in the central government enacting more stringent regulations on forest extraction and conversion (Ibid). While this was a success for environmental activism, the increased regulation of forest extraction exacerbated local struggles for engaging in the cash economy, which was Chipko’s
original agenda (*Ibid*). The contradictions between social activism and environmental activism came to a head when social activists called on local people to cut down their forests in opposition to state power (Rangan, 2004). Chipko is a reminder that while conservation and development have commonalities, they are not always complementary. Finding real and lasting solutions requires careful consideration of the particularities of place, and the needs and aspirations of the people who live in that place.

Poverty reduction and environmental sustainability are two of the Millennium Development Goals agreed to by world leaders in 2000 at the United Nations. CBNRM has become a ready vehicle for integrating conservation and development and has provided a basis by which conservation can draw on resources that up to this point had only been available to those engaged in development. However, development itself is a term without clear definition, where “all the modern advances in science, technology, democracy, values, ethics, and social organization fuse into the single humanitarian project of producing a far better world” (Peet & Hartwick, 1999, p. 1). The means of achieving development are even more hotly contested than the definition of development. With both CBNRM and development being nebulous concepts; a marriage between the two produces further ambiguity in goals. In the space that is so created, any number of stakeholders including the state, conservationists, local non-profit staff, social justice advocates, local elites, and ‘grassroots organizations’ compete to have a voice and achieve their own specific agendas.

**PRODUCING AN OFFICIAL “FIJI”: A STATE ENTERPRISE**

Fiji entered the enterprise of national imagining over a century ago with the cession of the group of islands by several ruling chiefs to the British crown in 1874. Prior to cession, and arguably for some time since cession, the idea of a ‘nation of Fiji’ as we imagine today would have been absent in the global imagination and that of the one hundred thousand or so inhabitants of the islands. With cession and the need to make the new colony economically viable and independent came the launching of Fiji into the global economy of the day. Sugar production soon came to be Fiji’s economic mainstay and stayed that way for nearly the entirety of the twentieth century. An intensive
agricultural activity of this sort sat uneasily within the context of ‘indirect-rule’ native governance that the colonial administration thought as suitable for Fiji. But within the context of a vast empire, a lack of suitable labor at one location was but a small obstacle. Much labor was available in another colony, India, and in 1879 the era of mass importation of physically able Indian men began. The indentured labor trade soon encompassed women as well, and by 1920, when this practice was abolished, 60,634 ethnically Indian men, women, and children were residing in Fiji (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

By and large, most of the indentured laborers stayed in Fiji and in 1970, when Fiji entered independent nationhood, there were about 241,000 Fiji citizens of ethnic-Indian origin in Fiji (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The indigenous Fijian population, which at cession was estimated at only about 100,000 had grown to nearly 202,000 by independence (Ibid). As seen in Table 1, in the 1966 census taken just four years prior to independence Fiji was divided 42%-50% along indigenous-migrant, or in the discourse of Fiji, ‘racial’ lines (Ibid). As seen in Figure 1, forty plus years on from independence, a period which saw three episodes of coups and many governments both elected and subsequently unelected, virtually 90% of Fiji’s population still continues to be composed of indigenous and Indo-Fijians – with the relative proportions of each rising and falling with each political upheaval (Ibid). Coups and associated civil strife of the late 20th and early 21st century has led to a decline in the Indo-Fijian citizenship of Fiji, but even at its lowest in 2007, Indo-Fijians made up 37% of Fiji’s population (Ibid). So, for all matters of purpose, as illustrated in Figure 1, for nearly a century, virtually every person you bumped into on the streets of Fiji would be either an indigenous Fijian or an Indo-Fijian. Given that Fiji attained nationhood as a colony and that the importation of a significant migrant population occurred very early in the colonial period, Fiji as a nation has always existed as a multi or more appropriately bi-ethnic entity.
### Table 1. Population of Fiji from official census (data from Fiji Government Bureau of Statistics).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indigenous Fijian</th>
<th>Indo Fijian</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>114,748</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>202,176</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>240,960</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>329,305</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>348,704</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>393,575</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>338,818</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>475,739</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>313,798</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Graph of Fiji’s population from cession to 2007 (data from the Fiji Government Bureau of Statistics).
State-Constructed Belonging and National Symbols

The ethnic reality of Fiji’s citizenry has always been a stranger to the discourse of the state. According to one commentator, “there has been little attempt to create a narrative of shared history and citizenship, and images of Fijian culture predominate in the public domain” (Norton, 2000, p. 87). Another commentator referred to Fiji as “superficially a multicultural society” (Doornbos & Akram-Lodhi, 2000). Much academic literature on Fiji centers on the particularities of Fiji’s production of nationhood. Although nationhood is a larger-scale concept than the community of CBNRM, the particularities of the image of the nation are relevant to community because it is within the nation that community lives. Thus, those who are absent in the state’s narrative of the nation can also expect to be invisible in the state narrative of community. Authors such as Norton (Norton, 2000) note the lack of Indo-Fijians in the narrative of Fiji as a nation.

My use of ‘Fiji as a nation’ is purposeful as ‘Fijian nation’ has vastly different connotations. It is telling that the very term, Fijian nation, would have a different meaning from Fiji as a nation. Because in Fiji the term Fijian is an exclusionary term that only refers to indigenous Fijians, the term ‘Fijian nation’ finds most usage in the discourse of ethno-nationalism. Then, it is regrettable that in Fiji the state’s image of the nation is overwhelmingly that of a Fijian nation.

Fijian ethnocentrism and ethno-nationalism dominates national symbols even as basic as the national anthem. The national anthem exists in English and Fijian (the words are available on the Fiji government website, www.fiji.gov.fj). At most occasions it is only the part that is in English that is sung, but the complete national anthem includes the Fijian verses. There are no Hindi verses. The national anthem is one of three pre-eminent symbols of the state and the languages in which it exists gives an indication of the nation the state aspires to be. That the national anthem only exists in the lingua franca (English) and in Fijian but not in Hindi suggests that the state is not as interested in acknowledging and celebrating the Indo-Fijian citizenry as it is the ethnic Fijian citizenry.
The national crest (shown in Figure 2) and the national flag (Figure 3) are the other two pre-eminent symbols of the state. The national crest consists of two indigenous Fijian warriors holding onto a shield. On the shield itself are the agricultural activities that were important to colonial Fiji - copra, sugarcane, and banana - and a white dove representing the flag of the predominant native government that existed prior to cession. Under the shield are the indigenous Fijian words “Rerevaka na Kalou ka Doka na Tui” meaning ‘Fear God and Honor the Queen’. On top of the shield is an indigenous Fijian outrigger canoe which represents the indigenous Fijian people and how they came to the archipelago. The national crest is a celebration of ethnic/indigenous Fijian history and culture. Fiji’s national flag came into being at Fiji’s independence from Britain. Cast on a blue background, the Fiji national flag bears the Union Jack and the shield from the national crest. The blue background represents the Pacific Ocean, the Union Jack is a reminder of Fiji’s colonial past, and the shield presumably represents the people and the state.

Figure 2. Fiji Crest (obtained from Fiji government publication Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Fiji, 2002)
Apart from being the indigenous inhabitants of the island group, indigenous Fijians in the latter half of the twentieth century comprised an ethnic majority in Fiji. Thus, the state’s preoccupation with ethnic Fijian symbolism is not unexpected or unwarranted. But given that Indo-Fijians make up a large minority, at times almost equivalent in numbers to ethnic Fijians, and because they too have a long history in Fiji, one would expect some acknowledgement of Indo-Fijians on the national crest and flag. There are no Indo-Fijian faces on the crest or flag, there are no words in Hindi, and there are no Indian cultural symbols on the crest or flag. The national motto “Rerevaka Kalou ka Doka na Tui” is not only written in indigenous Fijian, but also references a god who is not God to all the country’s citizenry. While for all matters of purpose indigenous Fijians are Christian (as is the British monarch referenced in the motto), a majority of Indo-Fijians, being either Hindu or Muslim, are not Christian. The overt and obvious imagery of the crest and flag are symbols that celebrate and are common only to indigenous Fijians.

The only imagery that may give any acknowledgement of or have any meaning to the Indo-Fijian citizenry would be the three solitary stalks of sugarcane that occupy the top left quadrant of the shield on the national crest, which is depicted on the national flag (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Fiji Flag (source Wikipedia, 2012)
At the time of the unveiling of Fiji’s flag, Indo-Fijians made up half the nation’s citizenry and they had been part of the nation for over five decades. The invisibility of Indo-Fijian faces, values, and symbols on the crest and flag, and the inaudibility of their language in the national anthem is testament to the Fijian nation being pre-eminent in the state’s nation of Fiji.

Another highly visible, or rather audible, tool of appropriation of Fiji as a nation to the Fijian nation is the use of indigenous Fijian words and symbols in national discourse. The Fijian words _vanua_ (land), _taukei_ (people of the land) and _vulagi_ (foreigners) are heavily borrowed upon in state discourse. Thus, when referring to the citizenry, indigenous Fijians are sometimes referred to as _taukei_ and the remainder of the citizenry as _vulagi_. In its submission to the Constitutional Review Commission, Fiji’s ruling party at the time, the SVT said that “The _Taueki_ are normally at the forefront of decision making. The _vulagi_ are allowed to participate… but they must not be domineering or forceful… Whilst they are welcome to stay and enjoy the fruits of their labor…” (CRC-S and CRC-VT cited in Norton, 2000, p. 98). Sometimes the imagery is a little more muted, such as the vision of the 20-year development plan (2001-2020) for the enhancement of participation of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans in the socio-economic development of Fiji developed by the state in 2002 which says “a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society where the special place of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans as the host communities are recognized and accepted…” (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Fiji, 2002 emphasis added)³. The implicit idea that this imagery produces is that as the ‘host’ or _taukei_ indigenous Fijians are ‘of’ Fiji and everyone else is a guest.

Other communities in Fiji, as guests, have no claim to place despite their long history in this place. In the case of the majority of Indo-Fijians their intimate association with India ended with their ancestors boarding the vessels that brought them to Fiji. Most Indo-Fijians of today can neither trace back family in India nor consider themselves to be part of India. Their parents and grandparents were born in Fiji. The social fabric to which

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³ Rotumans are the indigenous inhabitants of Fiji’s northern-most island, Rotuma. While Rotumans maintain a separate and distinct identity from indigenous Fijians in terms of cultural aspects such as language, legally they are treated as equivalent in privilege to indigenous Fijians.
they belong is in Fiji. But in the imagining of the state, even after a century of citizenship, Indo-Fijians are still *vulagi*, mere guests or outsiders.

**Resource Ownership and Marginality**

Land rights in Fiji are particular, political and heavily contested. Eighty-three percent of Fiji’s land is held communally by indigenous Fijians, eight percent is held by the state, and a further eight is in fee simple ownership (Ministry of Information, 2005). These figures have been challenged by some writers who argue that the amount of land held as native land is more than 83% (for example see Mausio, 2003). Fiji’s system of land ownership is a result of colonial institutionalization of selected existing Fijian traditions of the late 19th century. When Fiji was ceded to Britain by the ruling chiefs in 1874 the first resident governor, an ardent believer in ‘native’ rights was faced with the unenviable task of developing this distant colony into an economically viable pursuit for Britain. The task included intervening and arbitrating land disputes between the settler and indigenous communities. The land-holding and tenure system that was put in place by this government, which has survived almost unchanged to the present day, involved land being held communally and inalienably by indigenous kinship groups or *matagali* (Donnelly, Quanchi, & Kerr, 1994, p. 40, Lal, 1992, p. 14). Fee simple land tends to be in urban areas or in areas that had a large historic European settler population.

Historically and presently, Indo-Fijian ownership of land has been negligible. The *matagali*-based tenure system was put in place prior to the importation of Indian labor. At no point in Fiji’s sociopolitical history have Indians (and later Indo-Fijians) been able to secure significant fee simple access to land and to date the vast majority of rural Indo-Fijians live and toil on land leased from *matagali* at what many indigenous owners feel as a lower than market rate. The cumbersome administrative process involving land rental payments (all land is administered by the centralized Native Lands Trust Board) and distribution to land owners along with insecurities of depending on leased land for livelihood for tenants has led to much political debate and turmoil, and land ownership and rights continues to be a heavily politicized and ethnicized issue.
In a similar vein to land ownership, inshore areas are also considered the ‘property’ of indigenous Fijian communal groups. Although in practice indigenous communal units controlled access to inshore areas, termed qoliqoli, in the late 1990s and early 21st century the state attempted to legislatively transfer to communal owners control of their qoliqoli. In 2006, an impasse between the Fiji Government and the Fiji Military over three primary issues, including qoliqoli rights, came to a head. The Qoliqoli Bill, a long time in the making and introduced to Parliament in August 2006, aimed to transfer to qoliqoli members legal ownership, excluding rights of alienation, of their customary marine territory (Government of Fiji - Office of the Attorney General and Minister for Justice, 2003). The bill, which had been poorly explained to the general public, caused wide anxiety in key sectors including the tourism industry (Elbourne, 2006; Pareti, 2006). The government’s failure to impress upon the public that the bill was still being debated in parliament and, as such, was not yet legislation led to further confusion. Qoliqoli owners, thinking that the bill empowered them to discipline those who they deemed violators of their qoliqoli harassed tourism operators and fishermen. Some of the more notable cases included three fishermen being left adrift in the ocean when an altercation with qoliqoli owners resulted in their outboard engine being confiscated (Fiji Times, 2006) and both hotels and tourists being held for ransom by qoliqoli owners (Elbourne, 2006). Qoliqoli rights, just as land rights are thus a very real issue to social and political relations and the economy of Fiji.

State-Constructions of Marginality and Development

During the Qarase-led period (2000-2006), the state designed a national strategic plan for Fiji for the years 2003-2005 titled Rebuilding Confidence for Stability and Growth for a Peaceful, Prosperous Fiji: Strategic Development Plan 2003-2005 (Government of Fiji, 2002). This document was a synthesis of the state’s development focus. Utilizing a content analysis of this document I illustrate whom the state recognized as deserving beneficiaries of development. In this plan, the state’s social justice programs were structured to assist ‘disadvantaged sections of the community’ and these were the poor, indigenous Fijians and Rotumans, women, unemployed youth, children and the disabled. This 100-page strategic development plan was mainly a listing of broad policy objectives.
and details on what specific programs would benefit who were sparse. In addition to the national Strategic plan, the state produced a 20-year plan titled *20-year development plan for the enhancement of participation of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans in the socio-economic development of Fiji* (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Fiji, 2002) the policy document for indigenous development. This second plan was more comprehensive and lengthier than the strategic plan that had been formulated for the entire nation!

To appreciate the tone of these two planning documents it is necessary to consider the context in which the documents were developed. Fiji’s post-independence history has been one of almost continuous ethnic tension. However, in 1987, 2000, and 2006 these tensions gained violent expression in the forms of coups. As had happened previously in 1987, in 2000 an ethno-nationalist uprising violently took hostage of the democratically elected predominantly Indo-Fijian government. The electoral victory of an Indo-Fijian coalition in the 1999 election had been no small feat as the electoral system instituted after the 1987 coups were designed to ensure indigenous dominance. The mid to late 1990s saw a period of ethnic reconciliation which resulted in a more equitable constitution being drafted and finally adopted in 1997. Under the 1997 Constitution, in Fiji’s elections each citizen casts a ballot for two parliamentary representatives – one representative by ethnicity (communal roll) and another representative by geography (common roll). In the 1999 elections there were 46 communal seats – 23 indigenous Fijian seats, 19 Indo-Fijian seats, 3 General Electors or Others seats and 1 for the Rotuman community. There were 25 open or common seats. Thus the full lower house was composed of 71 representatives. Because of the dominance of reserved seats over open seats, and indigenous Fijians having more reserved seats than any other ethnic group, the electoral system was expected to ensure the continuation of indigenous Fijian domination in the governance of the nation. This situation was further guaranteed by Fiji’s post-1987-coups political history being dominated by a handful of ethnically-exclusive parties. However, by the time the 1999 elections were held, the number of political parties, each party still representing only one ethnic group, had exploded. These parties formed coalitions, the most viable ones being coalitions between a large indigenous Fijian party with a large Indo-Fijian party. It became apparent that one of two
such large coalitions would end up winning the elections. The elections were won by the coalition of the trade union-backed Fiji Labor Party (the most multi-ethnic of Fiji’s political parties but still dominantly Indo-Fijian), Fijian Association Party (one of two major indigenous Fijian parties contesting the 1999 election) and the Party of National Unity (paradoxically a smaller indigenous Fijian party). See Table 2 for the 1999 election results.

Table 2. Summary of 1999 election results. The two major coalitions are shaded blue and red respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FLP</th>
<th>FAP</th>
<th>PANU</th>
<th>LAS</th>
<th>NFP</th>
<th>UGP</th>
<th>A7A</th>
<th>NVTLP</th>
<th>Independent Candidates</th>
<th>TOTAL SEATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communal Indigenous Fijian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Indo-Fijian</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal – General Voters/Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Rotuman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seats</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL SEATS</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 2, the FLP had won the election outright in terms of number of seats. FLP unsuccessfully fielded candidates in several indigenous Fijian communal seats. Any indigenous Fijian support for the new government primarily came by way of its coalition partners. Even then, this government was, and has been to-date, by far Fiji’s most multi-ethnic government. The government, because of its strong Indo-Fijian representation and backing was immediately unpopular in ethno-nationalistic indigenous Fijian circles, causing friction which exploded in the form of a coup a year into the new government being in office. During the coup of 2000, the government was taken and kept hostage and the capital city of Suva was sacked and looted. Indo-Fijians in rural areas were terrorized by local indigenous Fijians, at times to the point of fleeing. The
military intervened and the hostages were eventually released, the Indo-Fijian members of parliament after fifty six days, indigenous members sooner (Tarte, 2001). During the initial days of the coup it was unclear to the populace who was in power, but later the country was administered by the President, who was ousted by the military, at which point the military took control and appointed a National Security Council. Finally, when the military-coup perpetrator negotiations had come to an impasse, the National Security Council appointed a caretaker government of prominent ‘good citizens’ to stabilize the political situation in the country and deliver the country to elections. Laisenia Qarase, a former businessman and Senator was named Prime Minister in this post-coup un-elected caretaker government. He and many members of his ‘caretaker’ government then went on to contest the elections held in 2002, and upon winning they formed government. The elected Qarase regime adopted the policies of the non-elected Qarase regime. The two strategic planning documents being analyzed were developed by the non-elected ‘caretaker’ Qarase regime and they became the guiding national policy through the elected Qarase period.

Fijians and Rotumans were the only ‘disadvantaged sector’ within the national strategic plan to receive a special strategic plan. “Other disadvantaged communities” had to make do with subchapters in the national document. In the Social Justice and Affirmative Action section of Chapter 5, each of the recognized disadvantaged groups was given a paragraph each. In addition, rural dwellers were given special consideration in the subchapter on Rural and Outer Island Development, but this particular subchapter turned out to be more a discussion on the maritime provinces rather than rural dwellers. The conflation of rural dwellers with maritime provinces had ethnic undertones of its own because while the rural landscape of the two major islands comprises of both indigenous and Indo-Fijians, the maritime provinces are by and large indigenous Fijian. Youth and Children were considered in their own subchapter while Women were given special consideration in the subchapter on Gender and Development. The existence of a special document for Fijians and Rotumans was an indication of the ‘special’ consideration given to this group by the state.
Despite being privileged to an exclusive development document of their own, even in the national document indigenous Fijian issues were given prominence. As a first analysis, I considered the frequency of mention of a particular ethnic group in the national strategic plan. Indigenous Fijians were specifically referred to in over thirty (30) instances, either as “Fijians and Rotumans,” “indigenous Fijians and Rotumans,” “the indigenous community,” and “indigenous people.” In this same document, Indo-Fijians were specifically referred only four (4) times, as “Indo-Fijians” and “ethnic Indians” and were called a community only once (Government of Fiji, 2002, p. 10) compared to indigenous Fijians who were associated with the label of community at least six times. In general, in this national document, Indo-Fijians were subsumed within the groupings “all communities”, “other communities”, “farmers”, and “tenants.” In 2000, when these documents were being formulated Indo-Fijians were near-equal in number to indigenous Fijians (see Table 1). Just as indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians too had issues that were particular and peculiar to that group. The lack of specific reference to Indo-Fijians and the dominant issues that influence their involvement in national and economic processes is a conspicuous gap in the national plan.

I then went on to analyze the use of the word ‘other’ in reference to ethnicity and the nation in the document. The document’s use of ‘other’ as a category to describe all of its non-indigenous citizenry, along with the absence of any demographic data makes this national strategic plan deceptive. Unless the reader constantly keeps in mind Fiji’s demographic make-up and the particular nature of Fiji’s ethnic politics, much nuance in the document is easily missed. As an example, I present the case of Social Justice programs in the subchapter Social Justice, which states: “In terms of beneficiaries (of Social Justice Programs) 17 are for all communities, 10 exclusively for indigenous Fijians and Rotumans, and 2 exclusively for other communities.” (Government of Fiji, 2002, p. 34). At the outset, this does not seem insidious at all. There are 17 competitive programs that all ethnic groups can access. The remaining twelve programs were divided along ethnic lines. But nowhere was it stated that, at the time of its writing, 45 percent of the citizenry were non-indigenous (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The injustice of fifty five percent of the population having access to ten exclusive programs and forty five percent of the population merely having access to two exclusive programs is easily
missed. It is ironic that such injustice prevailed even in the Social Justice sector. What was even more ironic was that even the Social Justice sector was organized and categorized by ethnicity rather than needs of the beneficiaries.

The Qarase-led state’s subsuming of all of Fiji’s ‘minorities’ into the category of ‘others’ and other communities was dual and interconnected. First, casting all who are not indigenous into the category of “other” allowed the state to focus the attention of the reader on those who were important to the state – indigenous Fijians. Secondly, by not qualifying this “other” the state was able to erase from Fiji’s landscape all but the indigenous.

The national plans were used as the foundation and rationale for the Qarase governments’ national policies. These plans were also used as a document representing the needs and priorities of Fiji to the international community. Thus, although the plans had the wide circulation, effect, and authority that all national plans do, the Qarase national plans were not products of a national consultation as other national plans tend to be. Instead the Qarase national plans were developed by an ethno-centric regime and accepted and adopted by an ethno-nationalist, non-elected, caretaker administration. The national policies that rose out of these documents and the image of Fiji that these documents presented to the outside world were not in any way fair to or representative of Fiji’s citizenry. These documents presented a highly visible indigenous Fijian sector, a barely visible non-indigenous population (and no demographic data to verify any suspicions, hunches, or doubts that a non-local reader may have). Through the state’s othering of all but the indigenous population the attention of the reader was unlikely to be drawn to the varied and interconnected marginalities that exist in Fiji, let alone to the ethnically nuanced nature of these marginalities and the state’s response to these issues.

The state’s positioning of a ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ or ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ as far as social justice and rights to the resources of the state, which can be considered a right of citizenship, goes on throughout the document. This state discourse allowed the state to narrow its developmental scope to only include issues of the ‘indigenous insider’. For example “[a] key goal of Government is to address this need [of including disadvantaged
groups into the development process] through affirmative action of Fijians and Rotumans as well as other disadvantaged communities,” (Government of Fiji, 2002, p. 9) suggests that by default all who are Fijians and Rotumans are disadvantaged. Any disadvantaged person who is not indigenous falls into the category ‘other’ regardless of why they are considered disadvantaged. Given the very disparate ways in which people can be disadvantaged (e.g. because they are an ethnic minority, lack access to the political processes of the nation, physically unable to participate in the mainstream socioeconomic system, lack of access to skills and education, lack of access to networks, just to name a few) the category “other disadvantaged communities” can indeed encompass a large variety of issues. Hence the national plan was able to bypass any real consideration or treatment of these issues by simply casting them all as “other” issues. In this national plan, the one disadvantaged group that deserved the state’s attention was ethnic Fijians and Rotumans without any reference to stratification of this very group by class, education, access to socio-political processes etc. By merely being an ethnic Fijian one was able to access a host of affirmative action programs regardless of how empowered that individual might be. Socially, politically and economically disadvantaged individuals and groups who were not ‘indigenous’ were left unaddressed in the state’s social justice priorities and invisible to the outside world.

My final example of ‘othering’ of all but the indigenous, and hence erasing the Fiji landscape of all but ethnic Fijians, comes from the subchapter that deals specifically with rural dwellers, titled “Rural and Outer Island Development.” This section is of particular interest to me as this thesis focuses primarily on Fiji’s rural landscape. Dismaying, although not surprisingly, most of the discussion dwelt on the high cost of air and sea transport, which is a very big issue for the residents of the maritime provinces. The high costs of transport were also a major barrier to the engagement of maritime provinces in the national and global monetary economy. Other issues that were discussed, including rural electrification, access to public water, telephone access and access to education, were again more relevant in the maritime provinces than in the rural areas of the larger islands. By and large, the population of the maritime provinces are indigenous Fijian. The rural Indo-Fijian population is primarily based in the sugarcane growing regions of the two larger islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu (see Figure 4 on page 30). Here
development issues include poor bus services, poor and insecure access to road networks due to land lease issues and poor road maintenance, and insecure access to public social services such as cemeteries. These issues are rather different from the issues that are faced by people living on the distant small islands of the maritime provinces. By the state’s aggregation of rural dwellers in the larger islands with the population of the maritime provinces, a meaningful discussion of the issues that were particular to the former was noticeably neglected. Although this section of the document did not make mention of ethnicity, by the issues that were considered and meaningfully discussed, the Indo-Fijian rural dweller was left marginalized.

**Realization of Deserving Beneficiaries – A Case Study of Flood Response**

On Thursday the 8th of April 2004, much of the Fiji island group was affected by very heavy rainfall. Continued rain in subsequent days and weeks adversely affected much of the population, but initial reports focused primarily on Ra, an area with considerable sugarcane cultivation (Gopal, 2004) that was especially impacted. Rakiraki, the township that services a large swathe of sugarcane country in Ra, was flooded and made inaccessible by road for some time (*Ibid*). Reports received from Labasa, on Vanua Levu, also spoke of devastation, and in particular the impact to the sugarcane crop in the Seaqaqa area (Narayan D., 2004). According to reports from Labasa, the situation there, in regards to the cane crop, was worsened by continual rain which prevented the cane crop from recovering from initial flood damage (*Ibid*). Other agricultural areas such as Naitasiri were also adversely affected when crops such as *dalo* were either washed away or inundated (Dalo farmers suffer losses, 2004). These initial reports suggested that much of North, Northeast, and Eastern Fiji were adversely affected by flooding (see Figure 4).

On Sunday, the 11th of April, Mr. Qarase made a Prime Ministerial visit to Tailevu, one of the affected provinces (Qarase approves $2.6m relief, 2004). His team visited five “villages” where a reported seven (7) houses had been washed away and thirty five (35) houses adversely affected by flooding (*Ibid*). Upon visiting the affected area, the Prime Minister pledged FJD 2.6 million to “provide relief assistance for affected villages in
In addition to the Prime Ministerial visit, the five villages were also visited by a team of health officials who were tasked with assessing the status of the villages and providing good-practice advice to the villagers (Victims urged to take care, 2004). The Regional Development Ministry also set up a relief rations program, which according to newspaper reports focused on villages in the Tailevu north area (Ministry provides food to three villages, 2004). In the subsequent days most flood-related articles in the paper focused primarily on the Tailevu area with some coverage of villages along the Tailevu/Ra border.

The Prime Minister’s declaration of funding for relief efforts for “villages in Wainibuka” is an ethnically loaded statement. In Fiji, the term ‘village’ is reserved for traditional
Fijian settlements. A ‘village’ is a formal entity in the Fijian Administration\(^4\). In contrast, in national discourse, non-Fijian rural dwellers live either in ‘settlements’ or in ‘X or Y area’. In general, while many urban areas and informal settlements are ethnically diverse and integrated, in the rural landscape the two major ethnic groups live as segregated units. Fijians live in villages and Indo-Fijians live outside them, often leasing land from the village. Given this very particular terminology, the Prime Minister setting aside $2.6 million for relief efforts in affected ‘villages in Wainibuka’ should be read as the Prime Minister setting aside $2.6 million for relief efforts in ‘indigenous Fijian villages in Wainibuka’. The state, under the Qarase leadership often used this type of language to pursue an ethnically exclusionary policy without raising international attention to its ethnically discriminatory nature as the overseas audience would not pick up on the subtleties of such language and statements.

Interestingly, despite the first reports of devastation being from Rakiraki in Ra and Labasa in Vanua Levu - both sugarcane growing regions with a high Indo-Fijian population – the Prime Ministerial visit, the health department visit, and the reported distribution of rations by the Regional Development Ministry focused on Tailevu, a predominantly indigenous Fijian province. Coincidently, newspaper coverage of the disaster also turned towards Tailevu. This was an interesting change in the geographic focus of the articles. Whether the change was prompted because Tailevu was the worst affected area, because of the Prime Ministerial visit and the prominence that this visit gave to the plight of Tailevu or because stories and accounts from more adversely affected areas were unavailable is an interesting point to ponder. Unfortunately during the course of my research I did not have the resources to further explore this particularity.

The first reports on how flooding had affected Indo-Fijian families, settlements, and sugarcane farms began emerging in the newspaper a full five (5) days after the flooding event (see Laborer relives flood ordeal, 2004; Naiwaluwaqa, 2004). Apart from the initial reports of Rakiraki town and Labasa being affected, articles documenting that the

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\(^4\) The Fijian Administration is the arm of the state’s apparatus that is tasked exclusively with issues pertinent to indigenous Fijians. This arm of the state is headed by the Ministry for Fijian Affairs, and the Native Lands Trust Board and has its roots in the Colonial era.
sugarcane growers were in need of assistance began to emerge in articles such as *Crop Rehabilitation a Must for Sugarcane* (2004).

While Government teams focused on collecting data on flood damage in villages, collecting data on damage to the nation’s primary agricultural export fell to the Sugar Cane Growers Council. On the 16th of April, with their preliminary report on damage to the sugarcane crop completed, the Sugar Cane Growers’ Council appealed to the state for assistance in crop rehabilitation and recovery (Vakarewakobau, 2004). They appealed not for government grants to farmers but merely cash advances of up to FJD 1,000 to affected farmers (*Ibid*). On the 18th of April, the National Farmers’ Union, one of two farmer unions, called on the state to provide grants for sugarcane crop rehabilitation to farmers (Farmers union seeks State grants, 2004). Even at this point, the state made no commitment to provide any form of assistance to the industry. Agriculture Department estimates of damage to crops reported on the 17th of April did not include damage to sugarcane and focused on agricultural losses in villages (Raicola, 2004a). What is more, the Department’s advice to farmers excluded strategies for sugarcane recovery (Raicola, 2004b). The state’s response to the flooding event was preferential in terms of focusing on relief to predominantly an indigenous Fijian landscape at the expense of those parts of rural Fiji that are predominantly Indo-Fijian. In addition, the response of the state also demonstrated their ‘hands-off’ approach to handling issues related to the sugar industry despite the national economy’s reliance on that industry.

The state was not unaware of the ethnically indiscriminate nature of the effects of the floods. The state was able to provide the media with estimates of damage which suggests that they were well aware of who had incurred how much damage. One newspaper reported that

“[w]hile some 25 villages were affected in the Central Division, the Western Division had more than 4500 people needing relief services. Commissioner Western Iosa Tikoca

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5 The Sugarcane Growers Council is the legislatively-commissioned and recognized body representing sugarcane farmers. The council comprises of representatives chosen by the farmers including a Chairman and two Vice Chairmen and a state-appointed Chief Executive Officer.
said 148 houses were swept away in the floods and 529 were submerged in flood waters,” (Red Cross ends relief supply effort, 2004).

Tikoca quoted in the excerpt above was a high-ranking state official.

There is an interesting juxtaposition here in how ethnic relations vary according to geography in Fiji. In the Central division the devastation was described in terms of ethnicity via the use of the term “villages” while in the Western division, which has a much more integrated population the devastation was described in terms of “people”. It is notable that the Tailevu province, the province in which the state’s relief response was most focused is in the Central Division. Even as late as the 16th of April, a week after the onset of flooding and with the extensive damage caused by the flood becoming apparent, aid and relief by the state was still being directed only at villagers (Kikau, 2004). On the 24th of April the Ministry of Health announced a scheme whereby school children and “children between one and five years old in villages affected by the flooding in Rakiraki recently…” (Tharid Ali Chief Medical Officer for Community Health in the West quoted in Free milk for flood children, 2004 emphasis added) would receive supplementary milk from the department to avoid malnutrition. Again, this is an example of how the state’s resources and focus were channeled primarily to indigenous Fijians, despite the ethnically comprehensive and indiscriminate nature of devastation caused by the flood. By the 8th of May, when my analysis of the newspapers ceased, there had been no commitment made by the state towards sugarcane farmers, the sugar industry, or Indo-Fijian citizens affected by the flood. I would contend that despite the state’s awareness of the ethnically indiscriminate devastation caused by the flood, the state’s response was based on ethnic difference and exclusion. However, the language that typifies state discourse in Fiji shielded this bias from the view of outsiders.

**CONCLUSION**

State-constructed images of Fiji as a nation historically have been, and continue to be, primarily indigenous Fijian. This image prevails despite Fiji having existed as primarily a bi-ethnic nation from very early in its colonial history. The large ethnic Indian population, which was imported in the late 19th and early 20th century by the colonial
government to provide labor on Fiji’s extensive sugarcane plantations, is not depicted on the national coat of arms, crest, or flag, and the national anthem has no Hindi verses. The Indo-Fijian population has insecure access to land due to the land ownership system was put in place by the early colonial administration prior to the mass importation of Indian labor, and the system has not been reconsidered since this event. Consequently, today most Indo-Fijians, especially those in rural areas, live and toil on leased land.

Even in the early 21st century, over a century after their arrival in Fiji, Indo-Fijians are largely ignored in the state’s imagining of Fiji. The electoral system has been designed to ensure that indigenous Fijians control the governance of the nation. The 1999 elections produced exceptional results in terms of producing a multi-ethnic representation in government, despite an electoral system that favored the dominance of indigenous Fijian representation. However, the coup of 2000 reinstated a non-elected indigenous Fijian government, which was later legitimated through elections.

State development plans of this Qarase period made little reference to Indo-Fijians and paid little to no attention to the particular and specific needs of rural Indo-Fijian communities. This general lack of enthusiasm for engaging in issues that were of relevance to the Indo-Fijian community was made very visible in the state’s response to an extensive episode of flooding in 2004. The state, both colonial and post colonial can be considered to have engaged in a campaign of massive ‘othering’ in terms of its consideration, depiction, and treatment of the Indo-Fijian citizenry.

Community-based natural resource management or CBNRM became the prevalent environmental conservation thought in the closing decade of the 20th century. This paradigm challenged previously held presuppositions that people and environmental conservation as incompatible. The mainstream acceptance of CBNRM brought social justice and development into the world of environmental conservation, which up to that point had been primarily concerned with preserving wild nature, sometimes in conjunction with states such as in the establishment of national parks. CBNRM’s people-centric approach brought conservation non-profits head to head in sociopolitical and
economic struggles. This people-centric approach also paved the way for a new thinking on how people relate to nature and natural resources.

Prevalent images of community in CBNRM have close and uncanny similarities with prevalent images of indigenous groups. Both are often framed and articulated as small, isolated, marginalized groups, with ancient norms and traditions that tie them to a place and the management of that place. For some time, academics have questioned and challenged these prevalent stereotypical images, and have provided valuable insight into how rural people engage with the wider world, including international non-profits. Some of these challenges are salient to considering how CBNRM contributes to addressing social justice issues in Fiji. The following chapters will focus on how one international non-profit’s CBNRM efforts create, challenge, and reinforce meanings of marginality, community and identity in Fiji.
CHAPTER 3. FIELD RESEARCH: EXPLORING THE MEANING OF CBNRM IN FIJI

This thesis focuses on three (3) community-centered initiatives in Fiji undertaken by WWF-SPPO to examine how the organization’s CBNRM efforts challenge and reinforce meanings of marginality, community and identity in Fiji. As discussed in the previous chapter, Fiji inherited from her colonial administrators a multi-ethnic nation with a predominantly indigenous Fijian image. Post-colonial sociopolitical processes and events have reinforced a strongly indigenous Fijian image of the nation. At the same time, indigenous Fijians have dominated the political sphere, and land and marine resource ownership continues to be in almost entirely indigenous Fijian hands.

This thesis is guided by the following research questions, which are designed to facilitate examination of how WWF’s CBNRM efforts challenge and reinforce meanings of marginality, community and identity in Fiji.

Firstly, what is the nature of “community” as discursively constructed by CBNRM in Fiji? What images of community are created by WWF-SPPO CBNRM communications material? What national and international discourses are drawn upon to frame and articulate community in this particular way?

Secondly, who is empowered by CBNRM to legitimately claim natural resources in Fiji? What beneficiaries are recognized and created through CBNRM in Fiji? Does the particular construction of community and deserving beneficiary reinforce or challenge the notions of deserving beneficiaries recognized and created by existing state discourse?

METHODOLOGY

This thesis primarily uses the method described as Discourse Analysis I by Rose (2001) to interpret, from WWF and state communications material, how community and deserving beneficiaries are produced discursively by WWF CBNRM and the state. In her book Visual Methodologies, Rose distinguishes Discourse Analysis I, hereafter referred
to simply as discourse analysis, as a Foucauldian method that “tends to pay rather more attention to the notion of discourse as articulated through various kinds of visual images and verbal texts than it does to the practices entailed by specific discourses… it is concerned with discourse, discursive formations and their productivity,” (Rose, 2001, p. 140). I employ discourse analysis in analyzing what type of “community” is constructed by CBNRM discourse rather than investigating how subjects are produced by that discourse.

**Identifying Projects and Collecting Data**

In order to identify images of community that are created by WWF-SPPO CBNRM communications material, I chose two major initiatives that were ongoing at WWF in Fiji: Climate Witness and the Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion (FIME). Both of these major initiatives were initiated by international WWF network, and as they were implemented in Fiji, they generated considerable national and international interest. They also produced a large amount of communications material. As a result, I considered Climate Witness and FIME good lenses through which to see how community is imagined at the international and local levels of CBNRM.

A third initiative, the *kuta* project, was also considered, but more in terms of analyzing who is empowered by CBNRM to legitimately claim natural resources in Fiji. This older project had not generated the same type or quantity of communication material as Climate Witness and FIME but was ideal in terms of considering how WWF framed, articulated and acted on social justice issues.

**Climate Witness**

Climate Witness was a ‘community-based’ initiative implemented by the Climate Change team of WWF-SPPO. In the initial stages in the South Pacific this multi-national project concentrated primarily on Fiji, with some work also done in Tuvalu and Cook Islands. The project was first conceived around 2004 and originally implemented under the supervision of the WWF-SPPO Climate Change Team, but the project’s Fiji component
was increasingly devolved to the Fiji country programme. Climate Witness project sites in Fiji are shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5.** Map showing Climate Witness sites, Togoru and Kabara in Fiji

The two main project sites that are referred to in the Climate Witness communications material are Togoru and Kabara. Togoru, the first Climate Witness site in Fiji, was situated near Navua, a town west of the capital, Suva. Togoru was owned on a fee simple basis (Naulumatua, 2006), in my understanding, by members of the Dunn clan. The Dunns were predominantly Part-European, meaning that they are of mixed ethnicity including European and Fijian. According to Nicolas Dunn the family had a history of over 100 years in Togoru (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a). WWF’s engagement in Togoru was by way of collecting Climate Witness stories from residents, especially regarding the rapid rates of land erosion that the area has experienced.
Kabara, the second Climate Witness site in Fiji was a small island in the Lau Group of islands in eastern Fiji. The island had four indigenous Fijian villages and a total population of less than 500 residents (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a). Ownership of land and natural resources on the island was through ‘native ownership’, that is, communal ownership by mataqali members. WWF’s original involvement in Kabara was through a project on forest conservation which later led to the island becoming part of the Climate Witness project.

I obtained both commercially printed copies of communications texts available at the WWF office in Suva and also downloaded and printed documents from the WWF website. Due to the large number of communications materials generated by Climate Witness, the following key texts were selected for analysis:

1. Climate Witness flyer (WWF-South Pacific Programme, n.d.)

This document is a very brief introduction to the Climate Witness programme at the global and regional level. The flyer was considered a ‘marketing tool’ for the initiative.

2. Climate Witness toolkit (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2005b)

This is an 18-page booklet which documented the “process undertaken on Kabara, Fiji… to document local impacts of climate change and to devise appropriate adaptation measures that local communities can implement themselves,” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2005b, p. 2). This booklet was intended as a ‘toolkit’ or reference for other practitioners interested in engaging with communities to document and prepare adaptation plans for climate change impacts at the local scale.

3. Climate Witness brochure (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a)

This is a three-page mini-magazine/brochure which contained articles based on some early Climate Witness activities. The brochure was meant for a general audience and was written in the style of a human interest feature in a newspaper.

Factors I considered for this particular selection of communications material were the audience for which they were created, the formats they are available in, and the
representativeness of the material as indicators of WWF’s current work and future directions. Most Climate Witness material were available in multiple formats, the three chosen texts are available as commercially printed hard-copies and also as downloadable texts on the WWF-SPPO website. The material therefore could be accessed by a wide audience. I considered the wide availability of these documents to suggest that the documents were indicative of the image that WWF wanted to portray to the wider world. In addition, the Climate Witness Toolkit was being promoted by the organization as a tool that other community practitioners could use to guide their work and therefore there was likelihood that the methods and constructions of community within this publication would influence many future projects in Fiji whether they were carried out by WWF, other organizations, or even government.

Interviews were conducted with key WWF staff members involved in the Climate Witness project in order to contextualize the communications material I wished to analyze. I also expected these interviews to provide insight into how local WWF staff had gone about implementing a program that had been devolved to them from the international network. These interviews are discussed in greater detail in the next section, Ethnographic Methods.

**Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion**

The Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion (FIME) initiative was undertaken by the Fiji country programme with considerable assistance from the WWF-SPPO Marine Team. The initial stages of FIME were instituted around 2004, but the project itself was expected to guide WWF’s work in Fiji for the foreseeable future. The Great Sea Reef, the primary focal area of FIME is shown in Figure 6. FIME was an initiative that aimed to conserve the marine biodiversity of Fiji through a methodology known within the WWF network as ‘ecoregional conservation’. This methodology “supports conservation planning and action at a regional scale; the overarching goal being to conserve and restore the fullest possible range of biodiversity over large spatial scales,” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005). Some commentators have said that ecoregional planning could herald the demise of CBNRM because of the spatial scale of this approach and also
because social issues are not prominent in the framework (Tsing, Brosius, & Zerner, 2005; Peterson, Russel, West, & Brosius, 2010). In my view however, in locations such as Fiji where the CBNRM model has gained widespread acceptance, ecoregional conservation expands the spatial extent of conservation and the ‘community-based’ methodology will simply be adapted to fit into the new framework. The social prejudices that have become embedded in the fabric of conservation in Fiji over the past two decades are unlikely to be overcome simply by the adoption of a larger-scale conservation strategy. In FIME, just as in other WWF literature, community continued to feature prominently and CBNRM was a method used to implement specific projects under FIME.

Figure 6. Map showing the FIME focal region of the Great Sea Reef along the northern coast of Vanua Levu, Fiji.
Of the FIME communications material, three publications, from varying stages of the ecoregional conservation process, were selected for analysis:

1. Setting priorities for marine conservation in the Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion Brochure (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005c)

This is the oldest of the texts and the summary brochure of the *Setting Priorities for Marine Conservation in the Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion* report (WWF - South Pacific Programme, n.d.b), which documented the visioning or planning stage of FIME. According to the brochure, “80 representatives and experts from the scientific community, government,…” came together to discuss and prioritize key areas in Fiji for marine conservation (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005c). One of the findings of this meeting was the scarcity of data on Fiji’s marine biodiversity and the need to carry out scientific biological assessments.

2. Fiji’s Great Sea Reef: The hidden gem of the South Pacific (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005d)

This is a 6-page fold-out summary of the initial biological survey of the Great Sea Reef. The survey was carried out by WWF and partners including several other international conservation non-profits, the University of the South Pacific and “local community members” as a follow up to the priority setting process.

3. Weaving a tapestry of protection and sustainability (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2004b)

This is a seven-page booklet, documenting the first prioritized conservation actions implemented through FIME in an initiative named Big Win and was the most recent of the materials analyzed.

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6 The University of the South Pacific is a regional institution jointly supported by 12 Pacific Island Countries. It is the premier tertiary and research institution in the Pacific Islands region.

7 The first two FIME documents, although officially published in October 2005 spent a long time in draft form. The last FIME document was produced much more expediently and was fully published in 2004. The official publication dates do not correspond to the actual production of the documents.
Because of the nature of FIME there are two types of communities that referred to in the material: human communities and communities of marine life. I discuss the discursive production of communities of the former variety.

FIME material was selected for similar reasons as Climate Witness, but even more importantly because FIME is not just a project but a vision that will shape future conservation in Fiji. Since the FIME initiative has been marketed widely to other conservation groups and the Fiji Government, it will influence not only WWF’s future work in Fiji but also to some extent the entire natural resources management sector in Fiji. The three publications chosen had wide circulation and I considered them to be a good representation of the initiative. As in the case of Climate Witness, I had hoped to interview key staff involved in the design and implementation of the FIME initiative. However, upon arrival in Fiji, I was unable to secure appointments, and the analysis of FIME is based solely on the communications material listed above.

Kuta

The kuta project was implemented in two villages, Navakasobu and Korovuli, both in Vanua Levu, Fiji from 1999 to the early 2000s. This final project brought conservation head to head with sugarcane country, arguably Fiji’s most productive and economically-important rural sector. The kuta project had been through its entire life cycle and was considered a ‘closed’ or ‘ended’ project; it offered me an opportunity to see the socio-economic impacts of what WWF deemed a successful CBNRM project. It also provided me with an opportunity to consider how WWF’s particular imagining of community affected the conservation effectiveness of the kuta project. In the kuta case-study the social justice aspects of the project is comprised of my own research. Since I have no expertise in the field of biology and botany, I refer to research done in 2001 by Ghazanfar (Ghazanfar, 2001), who evaluated the conservation successes of the kuta project.

Kuta (Eleocharis dulcis) is a wetland sedge found throughout the tropics from Africa to Asia and the Pacific (Ghazanfar 2001: 51). In Fiji, kuta has cultural importance as it is used to weave fine mats used for indigenous Fijian traditional ceremonial purposes. Consequently, kuta also has economic value through the sale of these fine mats, both to a
local market and to tourists. Some *kuta* products are also sold to other Pacific Island destinations such as Tonga and Hawaii, but the local market is the mainstay of *kuta* product sales. WWF-SPPO’s *kuta* project worked to restore degraded *kuta* ponds. The project was part of a wider WWF-UNESCO partnership, People and Plants, which “promot[ed] the sustainable use of plant resources and the reconciliation of conservation and development, by focusing on the interface between people and the world of plants” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003). Thus, the *kuta* project was a quintessential CBNRM project embodying both conservation and developmental goals. The *kuta* case-study is based on literature available on the project and ethnographic research carried out over a six-week period at WWF-SPPO in Suva and a week at Navakasobu village (see Figure 7). Since I was unable to travel to Korovuli, the case study will not discuss that segment of the project. Being an older project (one of the first implemented by WWF in Fiji) the *kuta* project had not generated the quantity or quality of communications material produced by Climate Witness and FIME. The materials considered were therefore of a different variety to that of the other two projects as is apparent by the list below:

1. Project progress report 1999 (WWF South Pacific Programme, 1999a)

2. Weaving women: a community comes to the rescue of Fijian wetlands (Mealey, n.d.)

This is an article in Air Pacific’s *In-Flight* magazine.

3. Women of Navakasobu: Weaving their dreams (Rogoyawa-Namata, 2002)

This is a feature article in weekend edition of Sun newspaper on Saturday. August 24, 2002.
Ethnographic Methods

Upon arriving at WWF in Suva, I requested and secured appointments with Climate Witness and *kuta* project staff members who I wished to interview, chosen on the basis of their involvement in these two projects. None of the FIME staff were available for interviews. As all the staff members interviewed were my former work colleagues I felt most comfortable conducting research in a informal setting using what I will describe as a *talanoa* fashion. *Talanoa* means chat in indigenous Fijian and is used widely in Fiji. My interviews were designed to take on the nature of an extended informal chat but a checklist of guiding questions for each consenting respondent was drafted prior to the interview to ensure that I did not leave the interview with significant unanswered questions. This list of questions is provided in the Appendix (see page 101). At the interview, each respondent was asked to describe their project and its goals, and was

Figure 7. Location of Kuta project site, Navakasobu in Vanua Levu, Fiji.
allowed to answer in an open-ended fashion. This often resulted in the respondent providing details for several of the guiding questions unprompted. The list of questions was used as a guide to elicit details that the respondent had not spontaneously provided. The interviews were informal and intimate rather than a formal question-and-answer session. The interviews were recorded with the interviewee’s permission on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed for analysis.

At the *kuta* project site, data were collected using a variety of ethnographic techniques including observation, interviews, and group interviews. Because my Fijian language skills are rudimentary at best, field work at the village was assisted by a former-WWF staff member who also has traditional ties to the village. Apart from translating, she was also able to provide advice and assistance on traditional protocols required to gain access to the village and villagers.

Prior to embarking on field work at the village, a traditional ceremonial protocol for gaining permission to work at the village, a *sevusevu*, was conducted. This included presenting the village and the chief with *kava*\(^8\), explaining the purpose of the visit and asking for permission to carry out field research. Once the chief had accepted the *kava* and granted his permission, field work began. A second traditional protocol of asking for leave, *i-tatau*, was conducted prior to our departure from the village. The protocol involved thanking the village for their hospitality and cooperation by presenting *kava* and other traditional items.

An interview in *talanoa*-style was conducted with a representative of the Fijian village “owners” of the resource, the village chief. A list of guiding questions for interviews at the Kuta project site is provided in the Appendix (see page 102). The interview with the village chief was conducted primarily to gain information on the social and economic conditions in the village, issues relating to land tenure, and a general overview of village life. Up to the point of this interview, it had been my understanding that the *kuta* ponds wetland area were previously on land leased to cane farmers. During the interview,\(^8\)

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\(^8\) The root of the *kava* plant is widely used in Fiji to make a traditional drink. The *kava* roots are dried, pounded, and mixed with water in a large bowl or basin called a *tanoa*. At traditional ceremonies all the participants (the chief, gathered village folk, and the outsider who is making a request and initiating the ceremony) then partake of the *kava*. *Kava* is also sometimes referred to as *grog*. 

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however, the chief pointed out that the tenant was, in fact, the government of Fiji by way of an agriculture research station.

The leader of the women’s group, which was involved in the kuta project, was interviewed as a key contact on the CBNRM project. The interview was carried out in English with some translations where necessary from English to Fijian or vice versa. Later a group interview of (women) weavers was conducted in Fijian through the translator.

At the cane farms, interviews were conducted where possible with farmers in the vicinity of the kuta project. However, in many cases, language barriers and a general mistrust of ‘outsiders’ asking questions severely impaired the quality and quantity of information collected.

In addition, a staff member at the nearby government research station was also interviewed. The kuta pond is located on land that the research station previously leased from the village.

**Data Interpretation**

Discourse analysis, in this thesis, aims to explore the rhetorical organization and impacts of social production of texts and images (Rose, 2001, pp. 150, 158) of CBNRM discourse. The process of carrying out analysis on the material followed the process suggested by Rose (2001) quite closely. Consideration was given to how the discourse was organized, how it aimed to persuade, complexity and contradiction in the discourse, and reading for what the discourse was silent on as much as reading for what was explicitly said (Ibid, pp. 150-158). I immersed myself in the material. As some of the material analyzed was from projects that I had been involved in, or had prior encounter with, I tried to suspend my existing notions. Once some initial categories and themes had emerged, the materials were coded and recoded as new themes and categories emerged. Some keywords considered in the initial coding process included; community, indigenous, agriculture, food security, natural resource, farming, and sugarcane. Pictures, photographs, and designs used in the material were also analyzed to determine
relationships between the image of community constructed by text and that constructed by graphics in WWF communications material. The initial categories used for coding photographs included ethnicity, activities being undertaken, age, gender, and setting in the environment. During this process, discursive formations and key themes emerged. These discursive formations and the images they constructed are discussed in the following chapter.

As suggested by Rose (2001, pp. 154, 158) the interpretive process also considered how the discourse produced its effects of truth by citing and involving key figures of authority and power such as government ministers, prominent academics and community leaders. Particular emphasis was given to how maps and figures were used to create “scientific certainty” and how anecdotes and appeals to tradition were made to produce images of “a natural way of things” (Rose, 2012, p. 215). Attention was given to what other discourses, such as local state discourse and indigenous discourse, were drawn upon to legitimate the particular construction of community in CBNRM discourse.

A third consideration is how the discourse deals with contradictions between discursive formations (Rose, 2001, p. 157). For example, how does WWF-CBNRM communications material deal with the contradiction between indigenous groups who are at once landowners and economically marginalized?

Finally, Rose says that what is not said in discourse can be as telling as what is said, and the analyst must therefore pay regard to those things on which discourse is silent (Rose, 2001, p. 158). What was not said is one of the most telling features of the communications material being analyzed. In determining what is not said in WWF-CBNRM communications material, attention was paid to who was not depicted in photographs and not mentioned as part of community, and what disadvantaged groups went without mention.

**Reflexivity and Methodological Limitations**

Discourse analysis is not as concerned with reflexivity in the way that most social science methods are. This is not to say that discourse analysts do not reflect on their truth claims,
but rather that the analyst recognizes that, through the process of conducting and presenting research, the analyst is also involved in discourse. Rose (2001, p. 160) suggested two means by which discourse analysts can practice reflexivity in a manner that is consistent with the method. Firstly, a discourse analyst recognizes that the analysis is not “the only truth,” and that the analyst practices “a certain modesty in [their] analytic claims” (Tonkiss cited in Rose, 2001, p. 160). A discourse analysis “aims to be persuasive rather than truthful” (Ibid).

The discourse of CBNRM, like any other discourse, produces subjects. I too am such a subject, and before delving any further I would like to discuss how I am embedded in and constructed by this discourse. My interest in CBNRM stems from having been employed by WWF-SPPO for a number of years prior to embarking upon my master’s degree. Although my own work had little direct interaction with ‘on-the-ground’ conservation, I became interested in issues of social justice and community in CBNRM as this framework was the preferred model of project implementation for the organization. I was struck by the ethnic composition of WWF-SPPO staff and also by the choice of project sites. Of the project-based professional staff, which at the time numbered approximately 20 in Fiji, WWF-SPPO employed only one Indo-Fijian staff member. In addition there was myself, an Indo-Fijian in appearance owing to my South Asian origins, but socio-economically and politically I am a member of what the Fiji Government terms as ‘Others’. This diverse group includes Fiji citizens of all but the two dominant ethnicities and is largely composed of part-Europeans and Chinese. Being a first generation migrant from South Asia, but not India, I was categorized as “other”. I am therefore not a member of either dominant ethnic group in Fiji.

Being part of a policy-based unit at WWF, part of my work involved creating communications material. Through this experience I became cognizant of how organizations, like WWF, construct and present to the outside world particular images of their work and its relevance to where they work. I became interested in how as an organization WWF constructed an image of Fiji and Fiji society through its communications material. This interest eventually developed into this thesis.
Other Limitations

Many of the interviews at the kuta project site were conducted in Fijian. Although I have spent much of my life in Fiji, I am not fluent in either Fijian or Hindi, the two dominant vernacular languages in Fiji. As a result, I relied on a translator for communication with my respondents. While I am confident that the translations preserve the overriding themes, details and manner of the conversation, some subtle content of conversations were no doubt lost. Being reliant on a translator also impeded smooth flow of conversation and openness between my respondents and me.

A second challenge was that the limited time that I spent in Fiji coincided with the Fiji general elections and international travel of key WWF-SPPO staff members. As a result my schedule for data collection had to be revised and I was unable to interview one key informant about the kuta project. However, I was able to arrange and carry out an interview with another project officer who had worked on this project and this interview together with information gained during another interview with a WWF project officer who had had intermittent involvement with the kuta project compensated for the interview that I was unable to carry out. FIME staff members were also unavailable for interview. As a result analysis of FIME was limited to analyzing the very rich FIME communications material. My previous knowledge of FIME and this initiative being very well documented in terms of the many reports, brochures, web articles etc that it has produced, I was able to analyze and discuss the particular way in which this initiative produces and considers community.

Despite these challenges of language and time I am confident that the data collected is representative of the views of my respondents and that the data that this thesis relies and reflects on are representative of WWF-SPPO as an organization in general and of its CBNRM projects in particular.

CONCLUSION

In order to examine how WWF’s CBNRM efforts challenge, and reinforce meanings of marginality, community and identity in Fiji, this thesis considers three community-centered initiatives undertaken by the organization. The primary data analysis technique
utilized is what Rose (2001) describes as discourse analysis I, a method that seeks to explore the rhetorical organization and impacts of social production of texts and images. Data was collected via a variety of methods including archival research on the internet and at the WWF office in Suva and ethnographic techniques both at the WWF and at one project site Navakasobu village in rural Vanua Levu. In conducting ethnographic research for this project, I encountered encumbrances due to my inability to speak either of the local vernacular languages, Fijian and Hindi. However, all my respondents were either fluent in English or at the very least, as in the case of respondents in Navakasobu, able to understand English. I believe that my translator was able to preserve the integrity of the communication between myself and my respondents and that if any detail was lost it would have been in subtle nuances. Other limitations included the limited time I had in Fiji to collect data for this project and my schedule in Fiji conflicting with the availability of one key informant for the kuta project and FIME staff. Despite these limitations I believe that the data for this project is representative of WWF and its projects.
CHAPTER 4. WHO DARES HOPE FOR ‘PROJECTS OF HOPE’: INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

INTRODUCTION

Community, a loaded term that is continually constructed, mediated, and interpreted by practitioners in various ways is central to CBNRM’s effectiveness as a conservation paradigm. In the current chapter, I will unpack and unravel the construction of community that emerges from the conservation practice of WWF in Fiji and consider who is empowered by CBNRM to legitimately claim natural resources in Fiji. CBNRM is a framework that incorporates both resource management and social justice goals. Hence, the success of a CBNRM initiative rests not only on its conservation/resource management outcomes, but also on its social justice outcomes (and vice versa). An initiative whose successes are not framed in terms of both of these broad principles can, in my opinion, be considered a failure. An initiative that considers only one or the other, but not both of these principles simply reproduces the outcomes expected from an ‘old fashioned’ conservation project or development project. It is the marriage of these two principles that make CBNRM an innovative approach and, and the overall success of an initiative must be judged by its success in delivering both types of goals.

There are two main ways in which CBNRM can be of benefit to those that are recognized as community. The first is that ‘community’ is able to derive material benefit from projects. These benefits are often specific needs for building the community’s capacity to participate in or perpetuate the survival of the project. Benefits are also sometimes written into projects as goals in and of themselves as is the case in the Climate Witness project. The second, less tangible type of benefit of CBNRM affects people’s claim to their environment. In situations where a resource is contested between two or more stakeholders, CBNRM can be a tool that facilitates workable sharing of the resource, or in a less utopian scenario, gives one stakeholder privileged access to the resource over the other. Even in instances where a resource is not contested, CBNRM can affect stakeholder legitimacy simply by oversight. In other words, when a CBNRM project
finds ‘community,’ all those who are not cast as insiders inherently become outsiders. Even without intention to willfully exclude, CBNRM can erode the legitimacy of a stakeholder’s claim to a resource simply by not casting that stakeholder as a member of community, an argument I further explore in the FIME example.

**WWF-SOUTH PACIFIC PROGRAMME BACKGROUND**

WWF South Pacific Programme (WWF-SPPO) was set up in 1990 in Suva, Fiji. The organization was able to set up the office by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Fiji through the government’s Department of Environment. In the fifteen years from 1990 to 2005, as a “programme office”, WWF-SPPO received approximately thirty percent of its budget, and key staff, including the Representative, from the WWF network (from WWF South Pacific Programme, 2002; WWF South Pacific Programme, 2003; WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004). Because WWF-SPPO was not set up as an independent office, much of the work undertaken by the South Pacific Programme was designed and executed in partnership with the WWF network’s “national” offices predominantly located in developed countries (e.g. WWF UK, WWF US etc). Financially, WWF-SPPO was almost solely dependent on the WWF network; the network directly funded a large part of the office’s administrative and conservation costs and also provided the office with the framework and opportunity to apply for other funding from major funding agencies such as DIFD, USAID, AusAID, the Packard Foundation, and MacArthur Foundation. The WWF office in Fiji was made up of a regional secretariat which oversaw and conducted the organization’s involvements in the South Pacific region and a Fiji-office which implemented WWF projects in Fiji. Similar country-specific offices also operated in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the Cook Islands. For the purpose of this thesis WWF-SPPO and the Fiji office will be treated as one entity, WWF-South Pacific. I will not discuss WWF-South Pacific’s operations in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands or elsewhere in the Pacific and my references to WWF-South Pacific pertain only to the organization’s work in Fiji.

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9 The Representative is the highest position in the WWF-Programme Office structure.
10 In contrast to programme offices such as WWF-SPPO, national offices are autonomous and financially independent and are expected make contributions of resources to the WWF network (panda.org).
As a network, WWF pursued its agenda of conservation by working with governments, the private sector, and local communities and indigenous people “to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature” (WWF International, 2005). In keeping with this global mission and operational mode, WWF-SPPO staff formulated a regional vision:

[t]he Pacific islands and oceans in which ecological processes, nature and biodiversity are conserved and live in harmony with the long-term needs of Pacific Island People. There are supportive legislation and policies that protect the customary cultural and heritage rights of the Pacific Islands People… (WWF South Pacific, 2005a emphasis added).

The organization’s strong commitment to social justice can be found not only in its mission, but also in rhetoric such as “[w]e believe that poverty cannot be eliminated without protecting the environment and that the environment cannot be protected without reducing poverty,” (WWF South Pacific, 2005a emphasis added) and “local livelihoods and governance of natural resources are very important elements of the WWF SPPO Programme,” (Ibid). These statements suggest that WWF SPPO’s approach to nature conservation includes the social institution of rights such as the right to controlling resources, the right to livelihood, and customary and heritage rights.

Throughout the region WWF employed about one hundred staff, with the vast majority of these staff being “Pacific Islanders” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2002, p. 2). The staff make-up of the office is of significance to this chapter when I discuss how the identities of the designers and executors of CBNRM projects do matter. It is these individuals who appropriate CBNRM by articulating themselves using a variety of discourses; hence, where WWF staff are from, and their own sense of identity and belonging, plays a role in how community is interpreted in CBNRM.

Every year, WWF-SPPO projects produce a variety of communication material to inform key audiences of the organization’s completed, current, future, and potential activities. The audiences that this material is intended for includes existing and potential donors, partner governments, other WWF offices, other national and international non-profits, the
stakeholders with whom WWF-SPPO currently works, other interested stakeholders, the public of Fiji, and a global public. Communication materials are typically in the form of reports, brochures, flyers, newsletters, web-pages and articles on the WWF-SPPO website, and posters. In the following section I analyze the contents of chosen WWF-SPPO communications material to uncover how ‘community’ is created by this material and thus shed light on how WWF CBNRM performs against social justice goals inherent in the framework.

(Re)Producing Community in Environmental Conservation Practice

Climate Witness

In Climate Witness, ‘community’ is a term that is invoked sparingly and pointedly. While overall the initiative is “working at the community level… to empower people not only to better understand the impacts climate change has upon their livelihoods, but also work to develop community based strategies …” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a, p. 1), ‘community’ is used in a much more selective manner in reference to individual projects. For example, in the Climate Witness Brochure, ‘community’ is used exclusively in reference to Kabara while Togoru is consistently referred to as a ‘settlement’. Juxtaposing lines from the first paragraph of two articles in the Climate Witness Brochure (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a): “[v]isit Togoru settlement, a 30 minute drive out of Suva …” (emphasis added); and, “…she was selected to speak as a Climate Witness on behalf of the Kabara community at a village meeting…” (emphasis added) illustrates how, from the outset, community is selectively invoked. The distinction between Kabara as a ‘community’ and Togoru as a ‘settlement’ is repeated throughout the brochure. This I take to be indicative of how in Climate Witness projects in Fiji, ‘community’ is not an inclusive referent for local people, but a term of difference and exclusion. Thus I come upon the first aspect of the image of community in Climate Witness: Kabara has it, Togoru does not.

The second aspect of community in Climate Witness is the concept of organic belonging. Climate Witness projects in both Togoru and Kabara deal with a common theme: coastal
erosion so severe that dwellings at both locations are coming under threat. The Togoru article mainly documents residents’ accounts of where houses, graves, trees, and the shoreline used to be, and how fast erosion is progressing to the point that the article is almost quantitative in nature. After stating that “The Dunns have lived in Togoru for as long as they can remember” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a, p. 1) the article goes on to announce gloomily that “[a]s the younger Dunns play, the older generations watch them and glance wearily at the sea as if expecting a giant wave to swamp Togoru displacing them from a place they have called home,” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a, p. 5 emphasis added). By this statement the article subtly creates the impression that Togoru is not, in fact, the proper place that the Dunns belong in, it is only a “place they have called home” (Ibid). In comparison, “… the Kabara community have developed over the years their tolerance and learned to ration water when the annual weather cycle enters dry months” (Ibid, p. 3), or in the case of not being able to catch enough fish for their meals, “[t]here is nothing wrong with either the bait or their fishing technique; the sea is their life” (Ibid, p. 4 emphasis added). These statements suggest that the people of Kabara are finely tuned-into their natural environment, almost becoming a part of it in an organic way. The people of Kabara are so intimately connected with their environment that even “[t]he children in the village notice… the predicament we are in…[and] fish are not so plentiful” (Ibid, p. 7).

On the other hand, the relationship that Togoru residents have with their environment is depicted as being superficial through statements such as: “Generally, the families are aware that there is something amiss [sic] not only has the shoreline receded dramatically but there are also changes in the patterns of plants bearing fruits and flowers” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a, p. 5 emphasis added), and “[e]ven Nicholas has noticed a pattern in how the sea claims the land…” (Ibid). Nicholas is an older member of Togoru (according to the article in his 80’s). In Fiji’s culture, which sees age as a mark of knowledge and wisdom, such a person would be expected to have intimate knowledge of the environment. The statement “even Nicholas” draws into question his relationship with the environment and his authority as a historian, a stark contrast to Kabara where even the children are depicted as having a close, authentic relationship with the environment.
A third attribute expected of communities by Climate Witness is that communities have traditions or norms in terms of their interaction with their environment. The essence of these norms includes a certain knowledgeability about the environment in which the community lives. Such a view of community is prevalent in the international discourse of CBNRM. Agrawal and Gibson noted conservationists’ preoccupation with such an imagining of community (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001) and according to Tsing, Brosius and Zerner, CBNRM assumed that “local communities are more cognizant of the intricacies of local ecological processes…” than distant managers (Tsing, Brosius, & Zerner, 2005, p. 1). Often this imagining of community had close parallels to what is generally thought of as markers and traits of indigenous peoples. In fact, indigenous peoples around the world have used these same arguments to claim rights to resources they have lost to the institutions of the modern age. What is unfortunate is that this particular framing of community leaves little space for migrant peoples, especially those migrant peoples who have made their migrations during documented history. Within CBNRM discourse there is a tendency to dislocate such groups, as they, migrants with documented history, have neither ‘organic’ belonging in their ‘new’ environment nor any ties to their ancestral environment.

Almost as if to offer an explanation for the inauthenticity of the Dunns in Togoru, the article explicitly states that the Dunns are “proud of their Irish ancestry.” However, in the case of Kabara, there are no explanations offered from where Kabarans hail. Kabara is constructed as the quintessential community of international CBNRM – the sort of community that the champions of dominant discourse of conservation would immediately recognize. The people of Kabara, even the children, were constructed into agents of innate environmental knowledge. The community was framed as organic and belonging in this place – Kabara. Thus, Kabara was framed as an unquestionably deserving beneficiary of CBNRM.

The international CBNRM framework should, logically, have space in it for Togoru too. The Dunns have a long place-based history in a small area and have a lifestyle dependant on their environment. These are factors that would entitle a group to a stake in CBNRM within the wider, objective, global framework (Borrini-Feyerabend & Tornowski, 2005,
p. 73). However, the Dunns do not have the same undeniable claim to ‘community’ in international CBNRM that Kabarans have. The Dunns, lacking a *timeless history* in their place, needed CBNRM and its agents at WWF to accept and acknowledge their authenticity. But the implementers of Climate Witness did not construct Togoru and the Dunns as belonging in their environment, as community. Instead, they portrayed the Dunns as outsiders at best and imposters as worst. It is in *this* aspect of Climate Witness that I most strongly see the embeddedness of Climate Witness in state and national discourse on community and belonging in Fiji.

The primary difference that the social landscape of Kabara has over that of Togoru is that Kabara is an island of four ethnic Fijian villages and Togoru a ‘settlement’ of mixed-ethnicity Euro-Fijians, termed ‘Part-Europeans’ in national discourse. Given Fiji’s history as a British colony, and having been on 18th and 19th century whaling and exploration routes, Fiji has a small but significant percentage of citizens of ethnic European-Fijian descent. Some, like the Dunns, have settled and lived in a particular place for many generations. Others have diffused into traditional indigenous Fijian villages and been subsumed within the indigenous Fijian village structure. Yet others have been city-dwellers for generations. Climate Witness in Fiji draws upon the prevalent discourse of belonging in Fiji and privileges community to the indigenous Fijian village.

Two exceptions to the trend of producing Kabara, and not Togoru, as community are found not in the body of the text of the brochure, but in a photograph caption and an acknowledgements box at the end of the brochure. The caption on the first photograph in the Togoru story reads “[t]hese tombstones were at the centre of a community settlement” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a, p. 1). Referring to Togoru as a community, but qualifying the community with settlement solves the contradiction. The second instance of inconsistency, in the acknowledgements box WWF “… thank[s] the communities of Kabara and Togoru for sharing their stories…” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 2004a, p. 8). This is possibly because the author of the acknowledgements box is different to those who wrote the stories. The stories on Togoru and Kabara were authored by two authors from Fiji while the overall production of the brochure (and thus the
acknowledgements section) was authored by a Fiji-based foreign staff member. The authors from Fiji speak through national discourses of ethnic differentiation while the non-Fiji national, unaware of the distinction or perhaps refusing the language of national discourse referred to both locations as “communities.”

From the analysis of Climate Witness materials and discussion with WWF staff, I recognize four aims in the Climate Witness initiative. Two of these four aims, awareness raising and resilience building, can be regarded as being of exclusive and direct benefit to local stakeholders. The former is an empowerment goal, the latter a developmental goal. This is not to suggest that the remaining two goals, collecting climate witness stories and using these stories to campaign for international responses to climate change, will not be of benefit to the witnesses and their environment. A successful and effective international response to the threat of climate change will benefit the climate witnesses, but these latter goals will not be manifest in a very tangible sense or in the immediate term, nor will they bring specific exclusive benefits to the community. These goals will produce larger-scale benefits for the global public, of which climate witnesses are a part. The achievement of these goals and their results will, however, be of more immediate benefit to WWF as an organization. This is because they provide material that can be used as campaigning tools in WWF’s international climate change campaigns. Hence, the contrast between the two sets of goals in Climate Witness is that while the former two goals are of immediate and exclusive benefit to those involved in projects (i.e. to insiders/community), the latter goals are of immediate benefit to WWF and of secondary benefit to a global public, which includes the witnesses. As a result, I consider the aims of collecting climate witness stories and using the stories to campaign internationally as the extractive phase of the project where the primary beneficiary of WWF’s ‘in-community’ activities are the organization itself and the aims of community awareness raising and resilience building as giving back to the witnesses. Together, these two sets of aims make the project beneficial to both WWF and the witnesses who share their time and life stories with the organization.

In Togoru the project focused primarily on the two aims of the extractive phase, collecting climate witness stories and later using them in the Climate Witness Brochure,
which was designed as campaigning material for WWF. In contrast, in Kabara, Climate Witness developed fully through the four aims from collecting of climate witness stories to WWF facilitating a community adaptation plan. In addition to the original Climate Witness project, the organization was also able to lobby for funds through the WWF-network, the Global Green Grants fund and the Fiji Government to provide the island with thirteen water tanks, a tangible material benefit following from the project. The island has also benefited through the training of villagers in reef monitoring and diving. Overall, Kabara and Togoru had vastly differing Climate Witness experiences. It is a striking, if not unexpected coincidence that in terms of deriving benefit from Climate Witness Kabara, the site that was more closely associated with the term community fared better.

According to the implementers of Climate Witness in Fiji the Togoru site was overlooked for the goals that would have been of exclusive benefit to the community for several reasons. These reasons included the very small budget of Climate Witness that made it impossible to consider new project sites. Kabara as an ongoing WWF project site took precedence over Togoru where WWF had had no prior involvement. I was also told that because of the isolation of Kabara, and hence the cost of working there, it was most likely that Kabara would not have any other climate investors. Therefore, as an issue of social justice the project personnel chose to work in this isolated island which would otherwise not have had much investment.

Taken at face value, both these arguments are valid justifications for considering only Kabara as deserving beneficiaries for investment. Where funding to implement projects is scarce, decisions need to be made on where project funds would make the most impact. While in the case of large projects it may make sense to use some form of multi-criteria decision making as to which site/project/community is ‘most deserving,’ in the case of small projects such as Climate Witness, these decisions are made by project staff using criteria that are not explicit or fixed. To a large part, these decisions reflect the viewpoints and values of the project staff who make them. As such, did the fact that lead project field staff of the Climate Witness initiative were from the same isolated island grouping as Kabara make them more sympathetic to the concerns and challenges for
those who lived on an isolated small island? Had the project field staff been from Togoru would they have treated Togoru differently? Had they been from a migrant or Part-European community, would they have had more empathy for the Dunns? Reflecting on WWF’s decision to engage only in Kabara, while keeping in mind WWF-SPPO staffing and the cultural identity of staff, the Climate Witness initiative takes on a different guise.

WWF-SPPO’s own literature paints Kabara as a more authentic community than Togoru. The material calls into question the proper belonging of the Dunns in Togoru and questions the authenticity of their relationship with their environment. The prevalence of these images and the systematic manner by which WWF-SPPO creates outsiders of the Dunns brings into question the sincerity of the rationale used by WWF-SPPO in only considering Kabara for the community-development stages of the Climate Witness initiative. One must question whether if WWF could find the budget and staff time to collect witness stories from Togoru (the extractive phase of the project), then they could also have invested the resources with which to empower the Dunns to plan to adapt to the changes in their environment? Even if WWF-SPPO had not been able to leverage funding for tangible developments such as the water tanks, diving training and reef monitoring training, all of which was provided to Kabara, could they not have at the very least invested some resources to help the Dunns plan for their climate-impacted future? To my mind, the variable benefits that Kabara and Togoru bore from their engagements with Climate Witness were foretold by how they were constructed as community in WWF-SPPO’s literature.

**Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion**

The writers of FIME, just as those of Climate Witness, spend some time at the outset of their documents to inform the reader on who they consider to be community. The construction of this community becomes more and more pointed and particular as the project matures and ownership moves from International WWF to WWF-SPPO. Community only plays a marginal role in the oldest publication, which documents the initial prioritization exercise. However, even here, “Fijians have [sic] important traditional relationship with the sea…” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005) and
reference to institutions that are exclusive to indigenous Fijians such as ‘qoliqoli’ suggest that FIME has a tendency to use community in an exclusionary sense, referring only to indigenous Fijians and the village, rather than as a referent of inclusion for all rural peoples of Fiji.

The opening remarks of the WWF-Fiji Country Programme Manager in the next FIME production state that “[t]he Great Sea Reef is one of Fiji’s hidden gems. It is essential that we identify how to manage the reef system more effectively and support the people of Macuata to conserve their global marine heritage in the long term,” (Rupeni quoted in WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005d, p. 1 emphasis added). This firmly places community in a wholly Fijian-Chiefly system/Fijian Administration realm because here, community becomes part of the people of Macuata. The brochure goes on to state that the reef is of “traditional importance” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005d, p. 1). Thus “[s]ince hearing that the Great Sea Reef was of global importance in terms of its biodiversity, the Paramount Chief of Macuata province, Ratu Aisea Katonivere, and representatives of 37 villages within five provincial districts, have been working closely with WWF… to protect this unique marine environment,” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005d, p. 4), emphasis added.

By the close of this document, the image of FIME’s community is complete: community sits in Macuata which is ruled by its Paramount Chief. Within this setting, FIME’s community of 37 villages in five provincial districts, harking back to Agrawal and Gibson’s small bounded territories, have traditional ties to the conservation target in question – the reef. From this point onwards, others who share the locality of the Great Sea Reef or directly depend upon the Great Sea Reef for some aspect of their life and livelihood become invisible.

The material also posits the community as stewards of their environment. According to FIME, concern for the environment extends from the very top of the community hierarchy, the Paramount Chief, down to the common man with “[n]ature at the center of Fiji’s way of life” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005c, p. 3). FIME’s construction of community draws heavily up on the dominant environmentalists’ romantic notion of
‘noble savage’ evident in statements such as “Fijians have important traditional relationship with the sea, reflected in their lifestyles, customs, traditional knowledge and history” (Ibid emphasis added). Again, this romantically intrinsic relationship between indigenous Fijians and nature constructed by local conservation practitioners is reminiscent of the image of community promoted by dominant discourse on conservation.

The project of tailoring FIME communities to fit the image of community in international discourse is continued in later materials. ‘The important traditional relationship’ that indigenous Fijians have with the sea goes onto become manifest in later documents in ‘tabu areas,’ which are described as being areas that are sacred or restricted (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2004b). The implication here is that tabu, a traditional indigenous Fijian technique of restricting fishing in certain areas is an ancient form of environmentalism. The concept of tabu has been readily co-opted by local environmentalists in Fiji to both make indigenous Fijian culture fit the image of the noble savage, and also to make conservation more palatable to rural Fijian villages. WWF has been particularly successful in this project and the language of tabu enters FIME at all stages of the process to the point that tabu is eventually modernized to Waitui Tabu, a synonym for Marine Protected Areas in Fiji’s local conservation-speak. Notable is that no mention is made of the original tabu being essentially a fish-aggregation technique in the build up to community feasts. These events include, but are not limited to, wedding feasts and funeral-rites of important chiefs. In the latter case the tabu is declared at the passing of the chief, which allows fish to aggregate in that area. This, in turn, ensures a substantial catch to feed the gathering that ensues the official period of mourning (usually 100 days). Therefore, while FIME may use the concept of tabu to construct a noble-savage of rural indigenous Fijian villagers, the traditional concept of tabu may not be one that springs from conservation-esque sentiment at all. Rather it is simply a pragmatic, temporary, and local decision to ensure that there are enough resources to go around during a period of high demand.

FIME documents use a copious amount of photographs and graphics in order to invoke certain emotions in the reader. The scientific nature of the documents are confirmed with
graphics such as graphs, figures, and maps. The splendor of the conservation target, and hence its deserving nature for conservation, are made explicit with bright, clear pictures of various marine environments and species including coral reefs and several endangered species (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. A collection of marine images from FIME documents.

FIME material also uses a collection of ‘people’ images (see Figure 9 and Figure 10). These images give us a glimpse of who FIME sees. It is notable that of the seven ‘local people’ pictures in the FIME material analyzed, only one depicted a non-indigenous Fijian, and this picture was of an Indo-Fijian fisherman with his catch on ice at the Labasa fish market (see Figure 9). The indigenous Fijian ‘people photos’ on the other
hand were of indigenous Fijians engaged in activities of ‘innocence’ such as an elderly women weaving and children playing (Figure 10). The picture that brought indigenous Fijians closest to modernity and engagement with the monetary economy was a picture of a young Fijian boy selling a string of fish on the roadside, a single, solitary, un-iced string of small fish, which is starkly different to the picture of the Indo-Fijian fisherman with his catch of large fish, on ice, at a market-stall (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Juxtaposition-Indigenous boy with a string of fish and a market stall of an Indo-Fijian fisherman.

There were no photographs of the countless indigenous Fijian fishermen who also engage with the monetary economy on a daily basis and own such market stalls. Neither were there pictures of the hundreds of Indo-Fijian children that live by the sea and play by the sea, or any subsistence activity that elderly Indo-Fijian women engage in. The image of the ‘noble savage’ was made complete by a photograph that showed old indigenous Fijian men in deliberations at the community segment of the FIME visioning workshop (Figure 10).
As in the case of Climate Witness, FIME too appropriates community from an international CBNRM discourse that romanticizes the community’s relationship with nature. Concepts of (environmental) tradition and boundary are called upon to create an image of community that has intimate knowledge (for example “Fijians have important traditional relationship with the sea…”), shared traditions and norms to manage and conserve the resource (for example tabu). These characteristics are some of the hallmarks of community in international CBNRM discourse.

The image of community that FIME depicts also draws on Fiji’s national discourse. This community is one where all things environmental are privileged to the indigenous population. The international construction of the images of community fit easily into Fiji’s own politics of exclusion and indigenous Fijian villages, with their long placed-based relationship and ownership of the reef, conveniently fit into the international construction of community. By this, CBNRM is co-opted by local discourse to the
detriment of other local stakeholders in Fiji. Just as in Climate Witness, FIME too gives a ‘local twist’ to an international framework.

FIME materials do not address the conflict that arises between the image of Fijian communities being environmental stewards and the clear need for conservation to address depleting fish stocks and reef health, a situation that suggests that (indigenous Fijian) stewardship of nature has not been very effective. The communication materials solve this contradiction by placing the blame for marine resource degradation on “emerging threats” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005d, p. 3) (as opposed to traditional threats) such as market pressures of commercial fishing including overfishing and poaching, pressures due to economic development and industrialization, and agriculture. The traditional Fijian fishing technique, fish poisoning, is termed an “old fishing technique” (Ibid) as opposed to a ‘traditional technique,’ so that the image of indigenous Fijians being the ideal environmental stewards is not challenged.

In addition, the central ‘conservation norm’ that FIME uses, both as evidence of the stewardship of indigenous Fijians of the marine environment and as a tool of modern conservation of the resource, tabu, has a debatable history. FIME does not address the temporary nature of traditional tabu nor that tabus were not traditionally imposed on large continuous stretches of inshore areas. By using the word tabu, which are essentially very temporary restrictions on part of a tribe’s qoliqoli, to refer to Marine Protected Areas, which are permanent to semi-permanent structures of environmental management on a network of several neighboring qoliqoli, FIME could be causing confusion within the local community on what the initiative aims to achieve, and the means of achieving this end. Only time will tell whether the enthusiasm of qoliqoli owners will last beyond the hype of FIME and the WWF-SPPO funding cycle. Noble savages or not, qoliqoli owners too are part of the capitalist national economy. Will they be willing to forego the financial benefits of owning such a large portion of Fiji’s inshore marine resources in order to preserve ‘wild nature’ for a global common and future generations?

FIME is a good example of how CBNRM can, wittingly or not, de/legitimize stakeholders’ claims to resources. According to FIME material, the array of marine
stakeholders that participated in the FIME visioning workshop in Suva in 2003 included “local communities and other key marine resource user groups” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005c, p. 4), which suggests a comprehensive treatment of stakeholders involved in Fiji’s marine sector. However, according to the report’s full participant list, the only “local community” participants were nine members of the Fijian and Rotuman communities, and “key marine resource user groups” were members of the tourism sector.

FIME’s construction of the Great Sea Reef coast as a network of rural, indigenous Fijian villages contradicted the reality of Fiji’s northern coast as a multi-user, multi-ethnic, multi-function landscape. The absence of marine users such as fishermen of whatever ethnicity and the domestic fishing industry is notable. As Fiji’s fourth largest export industry, fisheries contributed up to 1.5% of GDP in 2004/05 (Ministry of Information, Communications and Media Relations, Fiji, n.d., p. 45). Domestic, artisanal fisheries are important to Fiji not only as a source of employment, but also because fish and seafood contribute significantly to the citizenry’s diet and nutrition. Despite considering unsustainable fishing as a threat to the Great Sea Reef, FIME did not engage with or include the local fisheries sector during the conservation process.

Another significant, predominantly Indo-Fijian landscape that was invisible in FIME were the extensive sugarcane plantations of the northern coast. Nationally, over a quarter of the county depended on the sugar industry, which as the single largest employer employed fifty percent of the country’s labor-force (Ministry of Information, Communications, and Media Relations, 2006, p. 23). The sugar industry is heavily dependent on the coastal zone by way of land and since the Great Sea Reef is adjacent to areas of heavy sugarcane cultivation, the sugar industry and FIME are inherently and implicitly related. However, stakeholders from the sugar industry, whether they be farmers, field officers, researchers, or sugarcane processing plant officials, were not consulted during the FIME process. As far as FIME was concerned, the sugar industry was a non-stakeholder in the marine environment of Fiji and the impact of the sugar industry on the health of the Great Sea Reef or vice versa was overlooked.
WWF-SPPO has been able to use FIME visioning results to garner support, including financial resources, to pursue the recommendations of the exercise. Because the exercise was so well attended by officials from numerous natural resources-centered government departments, academics from the University of the South Pacific and overseas academic and research institutions, and the larger conservation organizations working in Fiji, the FIME visioning process and its outcomes are viewed as highly legitimate. However, these recommendations and future directions are a reflection of the priorities and interests of a group of like-minded stakeholders who only represent a small segment of the marine-cape of Fiji. There were no participants who had dissenting views or agendas that may have posed a viable and visible challenge to WWF’s panacea for marine resource woes – the establishment of Marine Protected Areas. As a result of the narrow definition used by WWF in recognizing stakeholders and the ethnic undertones in this process, the FIME visioning recommendations became a compendium of exclusionary and ethnicized agendas.

The recommendations of the Great Sea Reef survey subsequent to the FIME visioning process further illustrates how FIME’s limited consideration of stakeholders and the exclusively indigenous Fijian definition of community affects the rights and claims of other stakeholders to natural resources they depend on. In FIME, conservation planning was conducted at the level of qoliqoli. Action plans were designed only in consultation with members of the qoliqoli and those who were outsiders to this institution were left out.

WWF-SPPO advocated two main approaches to marine conservation in qoliqoli - demarcating sections of the qoliqoli as MPAs and reducing the number of fishing licenses given out for the qoliqoli. In order to mitigate the adverse economic impacts of these two conservation policies WWF-SPPO suggested an alternative livelihoods policy of increasing licensing fees for fishing rights. However, an increase in licensing fees only mitigates the loss of income by members of the qoliqoli and does nothing for commercial and artisanal fishers who have to purchase (these now less numerous and more expensive) licenses. In effect, the very success of FIME depends upon a segment of fishers being put out of work. The reduction of fishable areas (through the establishment
of MPAs), the reduction in fishing licenses and the increase in licensing fees will most likely mean that the poorest segments of the fisheries industry-small-time, non-resource-owning artisanal fishers-will be unable to access their livelihood. The FIME process did not invite the views of this group of people who were arguably the most adversely affected by the realization of the FIME process. Neither did FIME deem it necessary to provide for alternative livelihoods to this group of fishers, who would potentially be put out of work by a successful FIME initiative. By extension, it seems that either WWF-SPPO did not expect FIME to be successful or, that the organization did not care about or act responsibly towards the wider community that would be affected by FIME. It is interesting that a large portion of artisanal fishers for the local market are Part-Europeans and Indo-Fijians.

The very real implications of FIME’s construction of community lie in the far-reaching effects of this initiative. By the time the third document, Weaving a Tapestry of Sustainability, was written, WWF had been successful in engaging the Fiji government and the traditional Fijian hierarchy at its highest levels to commit to substantial Marine Protected Area declarations. The people of Macuata, at the behest of their high chief, were declaring Marine Protected Areas in their qoliqoli. Fiji’s Foreign Minister, at the Post-Millennium Small Islands Developing States meeting in Mauritius, made the following statement:

The Government of Fiji declares its commitment to initiating the consolidation of its national networks of Marine Protected Areas, or “Waitui Tabu”, as the mainstay of national incomes, coastal livelihoods and traditional cultures, hand in hand with the provision of alternative sources of livelihood…Further, by 2020 at least 30% of Fiji’s inshore and offshore marine areas will have come under a comprehensive ecologically representative networks of MPAs… (Government of Fiji, 2005 cited in (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2004b).

FIME had attained the highest level of state endorsement and WWF-SPPO’s FIME vision had become national policy. Given that non-indigenous Fijian issues were so poorly
addressed in FIME, and given that the state’s own discourse heavily discriminates against
this very group, FIME cannot be considered a ‘project of hope’ for the non-indigenous
thousands on Fiji’s northern coast.

When we consider marine resources as property and property as an enforceable claim to a
resource (Vandergeest, 1997, p. 5), then FIME succeeds in lending even greater
legitimacy to marine resources being the exclusive property of members of the qoliqoli.
According to Schlager and Ostrom (1992), rights to common-pool resources can be
organized in hierarchical tiers; the first and most powerful tier are collective-choice level
rights and the second and less powerful tier are operational level rights (pp. 249, 251).
FIME does not recognize that having a right to a resource does not merely mean owning
it. A person, or group, can also have a right to a resource by virtue of use, proximity, and
historical association. In the same fashion as native land in Fiji, qoliqoli too are
inalienable and thus no one has rights to outright sell this property. However, collective-
choice level management and exclusion rights are held by qoliqoli members who, by way
of selling licenses through the Fisheries department, provide fishers with operational-
level rights of access and withdrawal. By FIME only considering qoliqoli owners in
conservation deliberations, the notion that qoliqoli owners are the only legitimate
claimants to inshore marine resources is reinforced. Other users of the resource who may
have operational-level rights by virtue of historical use of, proximity to, or livelihood
dependence to the resource were excluded as legitimate claimants. Given the social-
justice aspirations of CBNRM and the participatory techniques that it aspires to utilize in
resource management, it would be expected that this framework would recognize that all
who have a claim to the resource, whether collective-choice or operational level, could
participate in its management, at least at the deliberative-level.

In Chapter Two (see Resource Ownership and Marginality) I discussed the very political
nature of qoliqoli rights in Fiji. It is in this milieu of a contested marine environment
where economic, social, and cultural agendas fight for priority that FIME conservation
aims are projected. CBNRM in Fiji needs to consider a more nuanced form of social
justice where marginality and disadvantaged status is not clear-cut. Social justice in
Fiji’s natural environment does not equate to fighting for the rights of indigenous Fijians
for control of natural resources. These rights are already conferred upon indigenous Fijians by Fiji’s constitution, and safeguarded and enforced by Fiji’s laws. To meaningfully engage with social justice issues in Fiji, the CBNRM practitioner, WWF-SPPO staff, would have to consider concepts of rights and property such as those suggested by Vandergeest (1997) and Schlager and Ostrom (1992). In practice, WWF-SPPO’s CBNRM initiatives such as FIME take into account narrow conceptions of social justice where indigeneity is conflated with marginality, that are in fact inappropriate for Fiji’s social justice environment.

**AGENTS OF CBNRM APPROPRIATION**

“[s]afeguarding our natural environment is central to maintaining our valued way of life,” (Rupeni quoted in WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2005c emphasis added). Etika Rupeni offers a good window into community in conservation in Fiji. To me this statement vocalizes the fuzzy boundary between the conserver and the conserved, the practitioner and the community. Etika Rupeni, like most WWF SPPO staff, is indigenous Fijian. In fact, WWF SPPO hires very few non-indigenous Fijian staff in a conservation capacity. While the accounts department is almost entirely Indo-Fijian, apart from one or two members at any given time, the conservation section is almost entirely indigenous Fijian. Given Fiji’s ethnically charged socio-political background, it is impossible to imagine that an ethnically biased staffing could implement an ethnically unbiased program. Like everyone else that belongs to Fiji’s society, WWF-SPPO staff are products of the national social discourse. They too are products of a state that privileges the indigenous over all other ethnicities that make up the nation, and a society that valorizes indigeneity while marginalizing the status of migrants.

WWF-SPPO’s website is a testament to the fact that WWF-SPPO staff are embedded in Fiji’s socio-political fabric. Passages such as the following are typical throughout the website:

> traditional patterns of community marine tenure, as well as indigenous ecological knowledge, can be incorporated into sustainably managing marine resources. Good local management with full community
involvement is a strength to FIME conservation efforts and will ultimately contribute to both the sustainable livelihoods and empowerment of the communities involved,” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2006).

Such statements are indications that local staff are adept at using international CBNRM-speak to leverage funding and credibility to their own socio-political agendas, however insidious these agendas may be. In the above passage alone, the ‘insider’ to Fiji can see that community is used only in reference to indigenous Fijians since ‘community marine tenure’ or *qoliqoli* is an institution only applicable to Fijians. In addition, the passage only speaks of ‘indigenous ecological knowledge’ and not ‘local ecological knowledge’. There is no space in this passage for the non-indigenous. In fact, for the uninitiated reader such as the western environmentalists and funding agencies that fund initiatives like FIME, a non-indigenous Fiji would not even exist because the reader would not have encountered a single referent to a non-indigenous stakeholder.

FIME also makes clear that they are only interested in providing benefits for those who are indigenous. In this passage WWF-SPPO says that “FIME conservation… will ultimately contribute to both the sustainable livelihoods and empowerment of the communities *involved*” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2006 emphasis added), which makes me wonder what happens to those who are *not* involved? Are they simply collateral damage of the global movement to save wild nature? There are other passages that indicate that WWF-SPPO staff are fully aware of the ethnically biased nature of resource ownership in Fiji, such as: “[o]ver 80 percent of land is communally owned by indigenous Fijians. This customary tenure system in Fiji enables natural resource owners to have complete control over utilization of resources within all of the inshore fishing areas or *i qoliqoli*” (WWF-South Pacific Programme, 2006). And yet the organization is happy to be a collaborator in perpetuating this inequitable division of resources despite being in a position to make a difference by using CBNRM in the spirit that the framework was intended- to make conservation into a vehicle of social justice.

In Climate Witness we witnessed the marginalizing of Togoru and the privileging of Kabara as community and in FIME we witnessed the erasure of the Great Sea Reef
landscape, the landscape of the northern coast of Vanua Levu, of all but those that belong
to the ‘province of Macuata’. The institution of the province of Macuata only speaks to
and of indigenous Fijian villages. To reflect on how this marginalization and erasure
takes place we must consider the mediators through which WWF works in Fiji. If WWF-
SPPO had greater ethnic diversity within their staff, in particular having more Indo-Fijian
staff, it is less likely that FIME would have been appropriated exclusively to the province
of Macuata. The eighteen thousand Indo-Fijians of Labasa town alone, and the thousands
more Indo-Fijians distributed in the rural landscape of northern Vanua Levu, along with
the less numerous Part-European and other ethnicities that belong in and to this landscape
were served rather unfairly by FIME being led and implemented almost exclusively by
those who were familiar with and products of an ethno-nationalistic indigenous Fijian
discourse.

CASE STUDY: THE KUTA PROJECT

The kuta project was a WWF project in Fiji that was conceived of in the wider context of
the global WWF-UNESCO People and Plants initiative, which “promot[ed] the
sustainable use of plant resources and the reconciliation of conservation and
development, by focusing on the interface between people and the world of plants”
(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003). The People
and Plants initiative, at the international level, was conceived very much as an early
CBNRM project. Conservationists, in attempting to identify sites at which to implement
traditional fortress type conservation, recognized that local people were not only not a
‘threat’ to nature, but had valuable knowledge and use of the nature that was to be
conserved. Thus, at the international level, the People and Plants initiative sought to
engage local communities in conservation (see People and Plants, 2002 and
www.peopleandplants.org). WWF-SPPO, however, was very clear in its objectives in
engaging with this initiative. The projects, titled “Pacific people and plants: applying
customary knowledge of use and practices to support sustainable use and protection of
community forests” aimed at “poverty prevention and alleviation through the effective
conservation and sustainable use of Melanesian forest by customary resource owning
communities” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 1999b, p. 1). Thus, from the outset, the
nebulous beneficiary-base of the international People and Plants initiative was tailored by
WWF-SPPO in Fiji to only “resource owning communities,” in other words, indigenous
Fijians. This treatment of community within the context of the project is similar to the
Climate Witness project discussed earlier, where the overall international goal of
documenting stories of people who have been affected by climate change translated in
Fiji to documenting indigenous knowledge on climate change. The kuta project, like
other WWF-SPPO CBNRM thus has an inherent bias towards indigenous people as
community regardless of whoever else may belong to the category of deserving
beneficiaries, which in the case of the kuta project is those who were threatened by
poverty. Contradictions thus appear between the goals of WWF-SPPO CBNRM projects
and the social justice goals of CBNRM.

Navakasobu village is a small Fijian village on the Northern coast of Vanua Levu, Fiji’s
second largest island (see Figure 11). By road, the village is approximately thirty
kilometers from Labasa, the main town on Vanua Levu and ten kilometers from Seaqaqa,
the nearest township. Typical of rural sugarcane country townships in Fiji, Seaqaqa has a
police station, a post office, a small hospital, several general stores, a Sugar Cane
Growers’ Council office and a fresh-produce market. Labasa, the main administrative
and commercial center of Vanua Levu is larger. Navakasobu village itself is a very small
village of ten houses, of which only eight were occupied at the time of my research. At
the time, there were only twenty permanent residents in the village. Many former
residents had left for larger urban centers, both in Fiji and overseas, to find paid
employment or to pursue education. According to the turaga-ni-yavusa, or head of clan,
the number of people in the village has declined rapidly over the last three decades.

Although the village is small, Navakasobu is ‘developed’ in terms of modern progress
and connection to the wider world. The village is connected to the central electricity
grid, has piped water, and telephone service. There was also television service- all the
houses that I visited owned a TV and radio. Regular transport by bus was available but
local ‘carriers’ or truck-taxis were the preferred mode of transport due to on-call service
making for greater convenience. The village was also connected to a wider world
through the many former residents who now lived in larger urban centers. The former
turaga-ni-yavusa held a seat in parliament and was Chairman of the national Sugar Cane Growers Council. Despite its small size, Navakasobu was by no means an isolated outpost.

**Figure 11.** Map showing the *kuta* case study project site, Navakasobu in Vanua Levu, Fiji.

The main income-generating sources in the village were land rents supplemented by farming and weaving. Navakasobu rented land to a Ministry of Agriculture Research Station and sugarcane farmers through the Seaqaqa sugarcane farming scheme. The sugarcane farming scheme, set up in the 1970s, was an attempt by the state to encourage indigenous Fijian participation in the sugar industry. Of the several Navakasobu households that took to sugarcane farming at that time, four continued to plant cane. *Kuta* weaving was done by the women of the village. These three activities—land rents, farming and weaving—formed the mainstay of the village *cash economy*. 
**Kuta Project as a Vehicle for Social Justice**

The *kuta* project aimed to deliver a very powerful tangible benefit - prevention and alleviation of poverty. In fact, one WWF staff member referred to the project as a “project of hope” (personal communication). The project also had a strong emphasis on gender. *Kuta* is a plant that is worked exclusively by women and the project was thus focused primarily on women. The involvement of men in the project was restricted to village and state-level decision-making processes and for heavy manual labor that was needed in the initial stages of pond restoration.

In order to recognize the poverty alleviation potential of the *kuta* project, it is important to contextualize the Navakasobu village economy. According to the *turaga-ni-yavusa*, the five *mataqali* of the *yavusa* earned FJD 8000 each and the *turaga-ni-yavusa* a further FJD 2000 annually from land rents. The combined annual land-rental income of Navakasobu was thus in the vicinity of FJD 42,000. The first of the major supplementary income sources for the village was sugarcane farming. I was unable to find out the actual value of this industry to the village, but using the average national statistic of FJD 8314 per farm per annum in earnings (World Bank cited in Prasad & Kumar, 2000), the four farming families in the village could generate an estimated FJD 33,000 per year from cane farming. The second major supplementary income source for the village was *kuta*. The woven products are of high cultural value, which is reflected in the market price of *kuta* mats which sold at between FJD 60 to FJD 80\(^1\). Prices of mats vary depending on size, design, quality, and demand. The leader of the *kuta* women’s initiative in Navakasobu estimated a woman’s annual income from weaving to be between FJD 2000 to FJD 3000. As eight women in the village weave, four being very skilled and the remaining four in training, I estimated a collective village income of FJD 24,000 or less from *kuta*. For a village whose primary income source earns FJD 42,000 a year, *kuta* and sugarcane provided lucrative supplementary sources of income.

The *kuta* project can be seen as a success in terms of contributing to poverty prevention and alleviation in Navakasobu village. Not only is the village’s income from *kuta*

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\(^1\) Kuta mat prices have remained somewhat stable in the period of 1998-2007. According to a WWF survey conducted in 1998, a mat cost in the vicinity of FJD 70. I paid a similar price in 2007.
significant, but it is also a source of income for a segment of the village that traditionally
does not have access to a cash income — women. The economic impact of the project
was not lost on its beneficiaries. One of the WWF-SPPO staff involved in the project
fondly recalled teasing conversations between men and women in Navakasobu where the
women would say “tell him not to use that kind of tone [on me], [if he does] I won’t give
him any [money]”. According to the Turaga-ni-yavusa “[the village women] also weave
to help with household expenses, school fees... It really helps us with our expenses.”
Thus, as far as Navakasobu village goes, the economic-development aspects of the kuta
project were a resounding success. It provided a significant supplementary income to the
village and distributed this income to the hands of women, a group not traditionally
financially empowered.

Like many conservation projects, the kuta project centered on benefits. Project planning,
literature, and personnel, all centered on who the beneficiaries would be and what
benefits these beneficiaries would receive. The intended benefits of the project were
conferred upon the recognized ‘community’, in this case the women of Navakasobu
village. However, in generating the benefits of the project, that is, restoring the supply of
kuta for weaving, the project also generated costs.

In terms of costs, the primary cost to the village was in terms of labor to restore the
ponds, an intensive one-time investment. The Ministry of Agriculture also incurred
tangible costs because of the kuta project. The Agriculture Research Station which had
been established on the leased land had developed the kuta pond into a grazing site for
their research in animal husbandry. With the removal of the ponds from their lease, the
Agricultural Research Station not only lost use of the pond area but also their investment
in ‘developing’ the ponds. While the kuta project had spearheaded the removal of the
pond area from the Research Station’s renewed lease, the project in no way compensated
the Research Station for its own loss of investment and for the lost use of the ponds on
which they depended.

In addition to bearing a disproportionate cost of the project, according to one Agriculture
Officer, the research station was also overlooked in terms of what they could contribute
to the project. According to the Agriculture officer at the station, being literally ‘just up the road’ from the village and being a state department, the Research Station was both willing and able to conduct scientific research on *kuta*. But he pointed out that the research station had neither been informed of nor invited to participate in the *kuta* project. Not involving the agriculture research station in the project not only caused what may have been avoidable cost to the Research Station, but also cost the project itself the opportunity to obtain expertise that WWF lacked in scientific assessment and research.

A less tangible cost of the project was the imagining of the landscape produced by the project. In the project’s communications material the sugarcane industry was depicted very negatively. The article that WWF produced for the Air Pacific *In-Flight* magazine stated that sugarcane cultivation was responsible for the decline in *kuta*, an indigenous Fijian cultural asset (Mealey, n.d.). The article failed to point out that the expansion of sugarcane cultivation to areas such as Navakasobu were in fact the result of a 1970s era affirmative action scheme implemented by the government to encourage indigenous Fijians to enter the cash economy. While this article goes onto say that “women were not consulted about their land being carved up for agricultural leases in the 1970s” (Tabunakawai quoted in Mealey, n.d.), WWF does not provide any evidence that Navakasobu women had any opposition to village land being leased out for farming. In addition, consulting women on financial and ‘business’ matters would not be expected as indigenous Fijian culture is by and large patriarchal. The lead WWF staff member who is quoted in the article asserted that “the environmental impacts (of sugarcane cultivation) was to be felt throughout the Pacific for generations to come.” This is a misleading statement as Fiji is the only Pacific Island country on which large scale sugarcane cultivation is carried out. Thus, while the sugar industry has left indelible marks in Fiji’s landscape and environment, its effects are certainly not “felt throughout the Pacific”. In a report on *kuta*, WWF says that “(i)t is believed that at the time of lease discussions and subdivision, those responsible might have depended on the observance by the tenant of the conditions in the lease agreement, to minimize disturbance to the ecosystem. The envisaged protection did not materialize,” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 1999*) casting the tenants, the Agriculture research station and sugarcane cultivators as irresponsible and ignorant tenants who caused the loss of an indigenous cultural asset.
This left little space for a positive imagining of cane farmers, who coincidently have meager incomes and are in as much need of poverty alleviation efforts as the village.

Drawing the cane farmers into the fold of project beneficiaries would not have required much additional effort by the project implementers. In the initial restorative stages of the project, cane farmer involvement could have been sought through land management outreach, a strategy that would have been of benefit to the project as well. Later stages of the project focused on training the women of Navakasobu village to train others on how to weave using *kuta*. This stage of the project would have been an ideal juncture at which the village women could have taught women from the farms to weave, which would have had two-fold benefits. Firstly, teaching the farming women to weave, would have spread the monetary benefits of the project to a wider stakeholder base. Secondly, involving women of the farming community in the *kuta* project would have spread ownership of the project to a wider Navakasobu. If, as suggested by WWF-SPPO, poor farming practices by these farmers were contributing to *kuta* decline, then involving the farming women in the project would have provided the farming community an incentive to improve their farming practices. But no such outreach was done, and the *kuta* project operated in isolation of the wider, non-indigenous Navakasobu, fortressed-off from the farms with a WWF-sign on the barbed-wire fencing.

Interestingly, two indigenous Fijian tenant sugarcane-farming families in the area were included in the project. Women from both houses participated in the project and regularly harvested and wove *kuta*. Men from these two households helped out in the manual labor required at the initial stages of pond restoration. Although these houses were not officially ‘part’ of the village, unlike the Indo-Fijian tenant farming households, the indigenous Fijian tenant farmers were very much a part of the social milieu of the village. The village itself, and the *kuta* project did not imagine these farming households as ‘sugarcane farmers’. They were just an extension of the village. As such, these two tenant farming families participated in and benefitted from the *kuta* project.

The Indo-Fijian farmers and the research station were not part of the villages imagining of Navakasobu village. They were not part of the social milieu of the village and seemed
to exist in a different social realm. Consequently, the Indo-Fijian farmers and the Research Station had not been informed of or invited to participate in the project. According to one farmer, the only knowledge that the Indo-Fijian farming community had of the project was that they could no longer fish in the ponds because the ponds had been fenced off. The *kuta* project, just like FIME and Climate Witness, had privileged community to the village.

Being positioned or being able to position one’s self as an ‘insider’ in a community is important in CBNRM projects. For the *kuta* project, WWF positioned Navakasobu village as ‘the community’ and the village considered the two indigenous Fijian tenant farmers as members so they became ‘insiders’ too. The insiders became the beneficiaries and bore the tangible benefits of the project – the revitalization of Navakasobu’s *kuta* industry. The ‘outsiders’ not only missed out on sharing in this tangible economic benefit, but also ended up bearing costs of the *kuta* project. The research station lost its pond, the farmers lost a fishing spot, and they both lost their place in the *imagining* of Navakasobu.

From the standpoint of conservation biology, Ghazanfar (2001) found the *kuta* project a mixed success. While the project had been successful in reviving a source of *kuta* for cultural purposes, it had not focused on restoring the habitat through a sound scientific understanding of what that habitat was like (Ghazanfar, 2001). As a result she concluded that the project has been unsuccessful in restoring a sustainable habitat for *kuta* and that the very survival of the ponds would be dependent on the weekly care provided by the village women (*Ibid*).

When I visited the ponds five years later, the wisdom of Ghazanfar’s words was painfully clear. I visited two of the four ponds, one which had been ‘restored’ and the other left with water-lily, the invasive species that is speculated to have contributed to *kuta* decline. According to the women, the one pond that was unrestored was intentionally left that way, clogged with water lily, in order to remind Navakasobu of how badly degraded the ponds can become. This very visible (and yet strikingly beautiful) reminder they hoped would encourage everyone to continue to care for the restored ponds. The ‘restored’
pond, however, also had patches of water-lily creeping between kuta. The women’s group leader attributed the resurgence of water-lily to some women harvesting kuta using knives. She mentioned with regret that some of the native trees that had been planted on the banks had died. For her, the project had not been a habitat or ecosystem restoration effort but merely a kuta-source restoration. Thus for her the project was a success. For WWF-SPPO and CBNRM, the project should only be considered a partial success, it kept with the operational specifics of CB and did some NRM but the C, community, was very narrowly defined with little objective criteria, and the NRM was only partial. But judging by the media attention generated by WWF-SPPO for the kuta project (a newspaper feature, a feature in the Air Pacific In-Flight magazine, a radio show series, and a TV current affairs episode that was usurped by the 2000 political crisis) the organization too considered the kuta project a resounding success.

According to Ghazanfar’s analysis, the greatest failing of the kuta project was that it was unable to replicate a natural habitat for the plant. The project had focused on replanting the target species, kuta, and planted a few native trees along banks of the ponds but other wetland species which are associated with kuta had not been planted. As a result, the ability of kuta to grow and thrive in the ponds was dependant on Navakasobu women’s weekly weeding efforts. Ghazanfar attributed this less than optimal outcome of the project to WWF-SPPO’s project design failures:

[species restoration guidelines] also indicate that a thorough knowledge of the ecology of an area is necessary, and as much as possible of the community in which a plant naturally lives… must be restored for the successful restoration of a species. This aspect of the kuta project has been neglected (Ghazanfar, 2001, p. 52)

WWF-SPPO on the other hand considered the activities of the tenant sugarcane farmers as the reason for the initial kuta habitat decline and for kuta not becoming self-sustaining (as an ecosystem) at the end of the project. I was told that silt running off the cane farms was a major contributor to kuta decline. Although early WWF-SPP kuta project literature identified the causes of kuta decline as road construction and sugarcane cultivation
(WWF South Pacific Programme, 1999a, p. xiii) later project communications gave increasing prominence to poor land management practices in the surrounding sugarcane farms (for examples see WWF South Pacific Programme, 2000; Women's World Summit Foundation, 2002). In addition, I was told by a WWF kuta field staff that “every year, when [the sugarcane farmers] cut the cane and burn it the fire just spread very quickly in [to the native trees that the project planted],” (personal communication) which led to the loss of native trees planted as part of ecosystem restoration efforts. WWF-SPPO made no mention that little was known about kuta ecology and the organization made no effort to add to the knowledge of kuta ecology before embarking on the project, or as part of the project. As a result, the project focused on, and stopped at, restoring kuta for cultural purposes – short of CBNRM’s standards of bringing development and environmental conservation together.

According to WWF, the very presence of the cane farms was to the detriment of the kuta ponds. In this case, the two possible options for sustainable kuta habitat restoration were that either the land not be cultivated or that land management practices improve. The kuta project, however, did not focus on either of these measures in any meaningful way. It pursued the first option to an extent that when at the time of expiration of the Agriculture Station’s lease a new lease was negotiated that did not include the area of the ponds, thus keeping the area of the pond in the control of Navakasobu village. The remaining portion of the lease was renewed and the Agriculture Station continued to occupy the land surrounding the ponds. Other surrounding land continued to be leased to sugarcane farmers for farming purposes. If the village had pursued the option of total non-renewal of leases of all areas adjacent to the ponds arguably the levels of poverty in the village itself would have escalated due to the loss of income from land rental and sugarcane farming. This would have been counter to the aims of the poverty alleviation. Such an adverse course of action would also have led to other social calamities as the farmers who work on this leased land would then have had no income.

The only real option for kuta habitat restoration was to improve land management practices on the surrounding farms. However WWF-SPPO did not attempt to involve the majority of the lessee-farmers in the kuta project in any way. The Indo-Fijian farming
families in the area, including the farm house on the opposite side of the road from the kuta pond, neither knew what kuta was nor what the WWF-SPP project was about. Because poor land management by the cane farmers impacted the kuta pond so adversely, one would expect any restorative project to have an effective farmer-outreach/advocacy component. The non-involvement of the perpetrators of damage to the kuta seemed counter to the ecological aims of the project because to restore kuta ponds in the long term the project would need to address the causes of pond degradation. There is little hope that this aspect of kuta restoration would come to fruition as the official WWF-SPPO project cycle for the kuta project has ended. During this project cycle tenant farmers were not brought into the project and thus the ponds and the farmers exist in isolation from each other, neither deriving the benefits that the other could (perhaps easily) afford them.

WWF-SPPO and the kuta project eliminated the Research Station as a stakeholder very early on in the life of the project. The station had not been invited to join the project at the outset and once the pond area was removed from the station’s new land-lease the project did not give any further attention to the station. WWF-SPPO did not consider the station as a resource that the project could use. According to staff at the research station, the facility was willing and able to provide input into the project. Given that there is little information about kuta habitats in Fiji, and WWF-SPPO’s own lack of knowledge on kuta ecology the station may have been a strategic and valuable partner in delivering a sustainable habitat for kuta. The reluctance of WWF-SPPO to recognize the station as a worthy ‘insider’ may have detracted from the organization’s ability to deliver a highly successful CBNRM project.

Given Ghazanfar’s research and my own observations while in Navakasobu, I contend that despite the wide acclaim, the kuta project has not been entirely successful by biological conservation standards or by the standards set by CBNRM, which is to marry nature conservation with development.

The kuta project was implemented during a period of great turmoil and change in Fiji’s rural landscape. Agricultural leases were expiring and their renewal was a heavily
politicized issue. Indigenous Fijian landowners were being encouraged by ethno-nationalists not to renew leases, and Indo-Fijian farming families were being purged from the rural landscape, with houses that had been homes to three generations being torn down, or ‘reclaimed’ by indigenous Fijian landowners. The heavily ethnicized 1990 constitution, put in place after the coups of 1987, was being replaced by a new constitution that was seen both nationally and internationally as being more equitable to all ethnic groups in Fiji. There was much anxiety among some segments of the indigenous Fijian community that the special privileges they had come to enjoy since colonization would be removed. There was hope among Indo-Fijians that they may finally be acknowledged as full and worthy citizens of Fiji. Ethnic tensions were high. It was a time of rethinking, reimagining, and redefining Fiji and those who fit into the rural landscape.

One of the primary aims of the kuta project was poverty alleviation, and even with the project goals restricted to the village, undermining the sugar industry in the area would have plunged the village into further poverty. The sugar industry provided well over fifty percent of the village income through land rents and the sugar crop. Kuta alone would not have been able to meet the shortfall in income should the sugar industry have failed. Had the village moved towards non-renewal of sugarcane farm leases the village economy would have been adversely affected. However, non-renewal of leases would perhaps be, from the point of view of environmental conservation, a success.

WWF-SPPO’s own imagining of kuta was unrealistic at times. For example, during one of our interviews a kuta project officer said “I only hope the ministry of agriculture understands how vital this one plant is to the restoration of Fiji’s economy,” (personal communication). This project officer did not take into consideration that kuta is one supplementary income source for a single small village (Navakasobu had only eight occupied houses during my research) and that it does not have the large market required of a major national crop. Project staff often become over enthusiastic about “their” species and such romanticism is expected from someone who has worked intensively over a long period of time to bring a project to fruition. But at times it seemed that WWF-SPPO as an organization was equally delusional, recommending kuta as a
“resource in agriculturally depressed areas to generate income for communities” (WWF South Pacific Programme, 1999). There is a market for kuta both nationally in Fiji as mats and handicrafts sold to tourists, and a limited export market to other Pacific Islands, but to consider kuta “vital” to the national economy and as a “resource for agriculturally depressed areas” is a bit far-fetched.

Currently, as per tradition, kuta is worked exclusively by women. It is not worked during the day or during dry spells as hot dry conditions makes the fiber snap. Kuta weaving is something women do as time permits; in the evenings and on stormy days. The production of kuta products is thus limited by many factors, firstly the market, and then the amount of kuta available, the skill of women, weather conditions, and women’s time availability. Therefore, while it is possible that kuta is “vital” to the Navakasobu village economy, it is doubtful that the resource can rival plants such as sugarcane that are “vital” to the national economy.

**CONCLUSION**

In WWF-CBNRM discourse, community is a term of exclusion and difference. The meanings associated with community depended to some part on the authors of the communications material, but a general trend of appropriating community to indigenous Fijians was found to be prevalent. Thus the Fijian villages on Kabara island became community, the predominantly Part-European Togoru was called a settlement, and only the Fijian villages along the northern coast were consulted in FIME in keeping with Fiji’s national discourse of ethnic difference.

Being able to position one’s self as community, or being positioned as such by a non-profit has tangible consequences for rural people. Some CBNRM offers to its beneficiaries tangible development opportunities. In the case of the Climate Witness, CBNRM brought opportunities of community empowerment to deal with climate change. Being positioned as community, Kabara received CBNRM benefits by receiving information on the issue of climate change and what this would mean in Kabara’s daily life, an assessment of Kabara’s vulnerability to climate change and strategic/action plans to address the issue at the community level. WWF-SPPO was also able to facilitate the
instillation of 13 water tanks on Kabara, an unexpected bonus. However, when groups of people were unable to position themselves as ‘community’, as in the case of Togoru, they were excluded from benefits from CBNRM.

CBNRM also confers benefits on those it deems deserving beneficiaries in more subtle ways. As in the case of FIME, CBNRM can un/willfully exclude stakeholders from its definition of community and thereby erode the claim these stakeholders have to the resource in question. By considering property through a very narrow lens, FIME excluded all but rural indigenous Fijian village dwellers from managing the area’s marine environment. This treatment eroded the already unrecognized claim that non-indigenous Fijians and other fishers had to the resource despite their long history of use and the significance of the resource to their livelihoods. By centering their conservation on qoliqoli WWF-SPPO implicitly supported the severely ethnicized and ethnically biased qoliqoli legislation which could sever the links of a significant segment of Fiji’s population to their livelihood.

The kuta case study was an exposition of how CBNRM created the space for reproducing and reinforcing ethnicized agenda in Fiji’s landscape. Despite the original initiative’s international focus on poverty reduction, in Fiji the kuta project was implemented in a manner that excluded all but indigenous Fijian beneficiaries. Other stakeholders were excluded from the project to the detriment of the project itself. Had the project sought to involve neighboring Indo-Fijian farmers, not only would the survival of the newly-restored kuta ecosystem been more likely, but the project also would have been able to spread its poverty alleviation potential a little further than small Navakasobu village. Perhaps the kuta project could also have provided a nucleus around which Navakasobu village could have interacted in a cooperative effort with their Indo-Fijian neighbors and tenants. Had the project incorporated the Agriculture Station, whose lease included the kuta ponds, the Agriculture station may not have had to suffer loss on investments and the project may have gained some of the scientific understanding of kuta that Ghazanfar found the project to lack. Overall, the limiting of stakeholders to include only Navakasobu village inhibited the sustainability of the project and undermined the social justice component of CBNRM.
The implementers of CBNRM in Fiji, being from Fiji, belong to the social landscape of that nation. By becoming WWF-SPPO CBNRM practitioners they are not miraculously transformed into unbiased agents. These practitioners are, like you or I, mediated by the society we live in, and they appropriate CBNRM both consciously and subconsciously into the discourses with which they are familiar, consistent with the social values that they hold dear. Their affinities, biases, and prejudices become apparent in their choices of project beneficiaries. Given the nature of the times, for a reputable international non-profit organization to fuel the fires of ethnic tensions by placing blame for the decline of an indigenous Fijian cultural asset *kuta* on the actions of Indo-Fijian farmers, or encouraging the unjust and unsustainable appropriation of national marine assets to a single ethnic group in a multicultural nation, may not be in the best interests of social justice and equity. WWF-SPPO’s ethnically biased staffing ensures that the only actors the organization recognizes, sympathizes and engages with are indigenous Fijians.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION: FINDING A PLACE IN COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

Community-based natural resource management emerged from and eventually became a critical response to traditional top-down nature conservation techniques. The methodology has had a three-decade run, and in the twilight years of the 20th century was the preferred conservation methodology of non-profits and donors alike. CBNRM assumes that the problems of large-scale, often state centered conservation can be overcome and greater social justice delivered by its smaller-scale community focus. As Li so aptly pointed out, CBRNM holds the ever romantic promise of helping the underdog; of “return[ing] to communities the right to control their resources and their futures” (Li T. M., 2002, p. 1).

The multi-scalar nature of CBNRM, and the multitude of discourses it draws from makes the methodology complex and problematic. When applied in the developing world, the framework provides a platform on which dominant-environmentalism, international indigenous discourse, northern capital, local identities, local politics, and local socio-political discourses all meet and co-exist. In Fiji, CBNRM is a methodology that is framed in dominant nations of the world and appropriated by local socio-politics. This thesis is firmly placed in CBNRM in Fiji. That is, it speaks of and to CBNRM that has been implemented by WWF, an international conservation organization, in rural landscapes in Fiji. This thesis is about the mediation of international CBNRM by local discourse in Fiji and the appropriation of the benefits of CBNRM to local beneficiaries.

The meanings associated with community can vary greatly. I considered the meanings associated with community in dominant CBNRM discourse. The prevalent images of ‘community’ in dominant CBNRM discourse are those reminiscent of Tönnies’ 
gemeinschaft (Johnson, 2000, p. 101), the noble-savage, and uncomplicated ideal indigenous identities that have come to be accepted as immutable. Local practitioners of
CBNRM and potential beneficiaries of CBNRM are not unaware of the particular imaginings of community in the dominant discourse. Emerging critiques of CBNRM shed light on how local people appropriated CBNRM by articulating themselves to fit the images of community that are prevalent in the dominant discourse. I also illuminated the particular meanings associated with community in state and national discourse in Fiji. In the state’s imagining, the nation of Fiji was appropriated to the Fijian nation. From the era of independence to the first decade of the new century, national symbols, including the national flag, crest and anthem, and overarching state documents such as national strategic plans were conspicuous in their neglect of all but indigenous Fijian imagery and issues. The national strategic plan of the last elected government, for example, used the term ‘community’ in reference only to indigenous Fijians and Rotumans, while the large Indo-Fijian minority was consistently denied this privileged title. In state and national discourse in Fiji, Indo-Fijians are explicit ‘others’, they are vulagi or guests in the land of the taukei, the indigenous insiders. Fiji’s national discourse on community and belonging in the natural environment has a close resemblance to the noble-savageesque, ‘organic’ communities that dominant CBNRM discourse expected of rural third world people. As a result, WWF-SPPO’s appropriation of CBNRM exclusively to indigenous Fijians was not a difficult one.

CBNRM came into being in an attempt to shift power and control of environment stewardship from powerful actors, primarily the state, to smaller, disempowered actors who conservationists assumed resided in ‘community.’ CBNRM, from the outset was a vehicle of social justice through environmental conservation. The methodology thus demands two sets of expertise in the practitioner, expertise in environmental conservation and expertise in understating socio-political issues in the settings in which projects are implemented. A successful CBNRM project needs to deliver not only positive environmental outcomes that are the expected successes of a traditional top-down conservation strategy, but also to deliver empowerment and development.
Images of Community in WWF CBNRM – Intersections of the International and National

The three major CBNRM initiatives of WWF-SPPO that were discussed, Climate Witness, FIME, and the kuta Project, all had a predilection towards recognizing indigenous Fijian villages as community. Admittedly, indigenous Fijian villages bear an overt and inherent resemblance to the ideal and idyllic community of international CBNRM. Villages have legislative and state-endorsed claim to land through ‘traditional’ resource ownership and easily fit the first aspect of community prevalent in dominant discourse – community as small bounded territories (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001). The traditional indigenous Fijian concept of tabu, or restrictions on take, can also be construed as the existence of environmentalist norms, a second virtue ascribed to community by advocates (Ibid). Although indigenous Fijian villages are deeply fractured by socio-economic difference, which contravenes the third aspect of community, that is, homogenous structure (Ibid), this can be positive in that it enables the enforcement of environmentalist norms within the village – norms, such as tabu, which rely on a social hierarchy for implementation and enforcement. When all is said and done, indigenous Fijian villages appear to be a good fit into the community of dominant CBNRM.

The problem arises in that Fiji is not entirely composed of indigenous Fijian villages. In Fiji’s rural landscape, where FIME and the kuta project were located, indigenous Fijian villages share the landscape with Indo-Fijians, part-Europeans, and smaller minority groups. In Climate Witness, an indigenous Fijian community and a part-European community competed, without ever knowing it, for WWF-SPPO’s limited resources. Real rural Fiji is made up of more than indigenous Fijian ‘noble-savages’ living in the small bounded territories of traditional villages.

Indo-Fijians have been part of Fiji from the very early colonial period and some part-European communities predate Indo-Fijians. These ‘minorities,’ who together make up about half of Fiji’s citizenry, have been part of Fiji for over a century. Historical socio-political processes in Fiji have ensured that Indo-Fijian and part-European communities do not fit the image of community in international CBNRM. In terms of belonging to and being in possession of small bounded territories, rural Indo-Fijians and part-
Europeans do not fare well. They do not own ‘traditional land.’ Rather, their only claim to ‘owning’ land is via fee simple ownership. With over 87 percent of Fiji’s land being in mataqali or traditional ownership, and most fee simple land being associated with the major urban centers, fee simple ownership of rural land is rare. In the case of rural Indo-Fijians, their claim to land is often via lease agreements with indigenous Fijian ‘traditional’ land owners. Even where there has been security in tenancy and multi-generational occupation of a piece of land by an Indo-Fijian family, that land is still owned by the mataqali. The most frequently used and available topographic maps that are produced by the state only reference mataqali owners, not tenants or fee simple owners. Despite the multi-generational occupation of a piece of land by Indo-Fijians or part-Europeans, and regardless of the intimacy of the occupants with that land or their knowledgeableness about the land, for all matters of purpose all that is visible is mataqali land. Indo-Fijians and part-Europeans do not easily meet the first aspect of ‘community’ in dominant CBNRM – having a visible presence in small bounded territories.

These two communities, Indo-Fijians and part-Europeans do not fare much better in the other two aspects of community recognized by international CBNRM either. Even though Indo-Fijians possess knowledge of their environment, as evidenced in temples that recognize the ‘divine’ in local geological features, or the use of local food in their cuisine, they and Part-Europeans like the Dunns are not recognized as community by CBNRM in Fiji. Because, in comparison to indigenous Fijians they do not have a long place-based history, non-indigenous knowledge of the environment is easily discounted as superficial or non-existent. The essential egalitarianism required of a farmer to succeed in lease-based sugarcane farming, and the diffuse structures and institutions such as farming organizations and religious organizations that characterize the Indo-Fijian farming community are not recognized as institutions of idealized environmental stewardship in the way that the chiefly hierarchy and tabu is. Environmental stewardship in Fiji is recognized, by the state, and by CBNRM, as residing in the indigenous, the taukei.

Just as a story is only as good as its telling, community is only as good as its social construction. What both the Indo-Fijian and part-European community lack is not so
much community as the right image of community, one that will be recognized by
dominant conservation. What Kabara, the indigenous Fijian community of Macuata, and
the people of Navakasobu had for themselves were advocates within WWF-SPPO who
knew the ‘community’ intimately and framed and articulated the characteristics of place
and people to fit the image of ‘community’ held by CBNRM practitioners. The key field
staff that was involved in Climate Witness in WWF-SPPO was from the same isolated
island group that Kabara belonged to. This intimacy most likely enabled the staff to have
empathy for Kabarans and the challenges they faced from living on a small island
vulnerable to the ravages of nature. These staff would be more than aware of the very
real nature of the consequences of climate change on Kabaran’s lives and livelihoods.
Being an existent WWF-SPPO project site, Kabara would also have had the benefit of
being somewhat acquainted with dominant CBNRM-speak. Thus, the community would
have had some of the tools with which to articulate their community in the image that
dominant CBNRM expects. As evidenced by Climate Witness communications material,
WWF staff actively positioned and framed groups that they had affinity to in the ‘right’
image of community. At the same time, there were no part-European staff involved in
the Climate Witness project, nor in fact at WWF-SPPO at the time (WWF-SPPO has had
some part-European volunteer and/or part-time staff from time to time but not in a long-
term meaningful way). The primary factor that disabled the Dunns from deriving benefit
from Climate Witness was not whether or not they were a community. What the Dunns
lacked was an advocate at WWF-SPPO, an insider who indentified with them, understood
their traditions and lifestyle, empathized with their position, and who would frame the
stories of their lives to fit an image of community that would be recognizable to dominant
CBNRM.

The conundrum of CBNRM in Fiji, is that as Li states, through CBNRM, “advocates aim
to return to communities rights to their resources” (Li, 2002). There are two problems
with this view. The first is that community is how the practitioner interprets it. The
second is that if rights are to be returned to communities, then they must have been taken
away to begin with. In most instances where CBNRM intervenes, rights have been taken
away by powerful actors such as the state. However, in the context of Fiji, the
community that is obviously recognizable to dominant CBNRM already has state-
ascribed constitutional and legislative rights to their natural resources. For example, *qoliqoli* members have already been conferred rights to marine resources via the state and thus, CBNRM-FIME only served to reaffirm state-conferred rights. In addition, there are marine resource users who have long been disenfranchised from participating in the management of a resource on which their livelihoods depend. WWF-CBNRM’s strengthening of rights of *qoliqoli* members further eroded the rights of ‘other’ marine resource users, namely non-resource owning fishers, to inshore areas.

In Fiji, there is no ‘community’ to return rights to. FIME only considered those stakeholders in the Great Sea Reef that already had state-conferred rights. FIME aimed to conserve, or at the very least sustainably use, a heavily contested and politicized resource. The FIME initiative, with this CBNRM-inspired framework, presented WWF-SPPO and the Great Sea Reef community a potential space within which to articulate and deliberate a contentious social, economic, and political issue – *qoliqoli*-rights in a multi-ethnic community in a capitalist economy. But by interpreting community, and hence its stakeholder base as indigenous Fijian, FIME failed in achieving social justice through the opening up of marine resource management to include stakeholders who have previously been and continue to be marginalized. Rights to resources were not ‘returned’ to anyone, for there was no one to return rights to, and marginalized *vulagi*, continued to be marginalized *vulagi*, only now with fewer fishing licenses to compete for. FIME merely reproduced and reinforced existing marginalizations and provided a new institutional framework, conservation, by which to do so.

Fiji like her nearest large neighbors, Australia and New Zealand, is a former British colony. However, the point of departure in their history is Fiji’s treatment of the indigenous population. The Maori of New Zealand and the Aboriginals of Australia were marginalized by the colonial powers and engaged (and continue to do so) in protracted conflicts with the state for rights to resources. Indigenous Fijians on the other hand, were and continue to be in control of their resources. The much-publicized struggle for rights to resources by aboriginal peoples in Australia and the Maori of New Zealand have, however, created spaces that allow indigeneity to be conflated with economic and social marginality. For the large part, these groups in Australia and New Zealand have watched
later ‘migrant’ communities flourish on what the indigenous communities consider ‘our’ land. Watching these conflicts has added to the deep sense of insecurity among Fiji’s own indigenous population. The analogies seem obvious: the large migrant Indo-Fijian community and their perceived success, especially in the business sector, appears to closely parallel the economic disparities between indigenous and immigrant populations in Australia and New Zealand. The thousands of poor Indo-Fijian farmers, semi-subistence and small-time fishermen, and small time rural businesspeople who all occupy a precarious position between breaking even and falling into debt are invisible from the state’s rhetoric and the national imagination. The insecurities of indigenous Fijians, however ill-founded, have been exploited by successive governments in Fiji to put forward ethnically divisive legislation. CBNRM merely reproducing the imagery of this discourse does nothing for strengthening the rights of local people to their resources, environmental conservation, or building a more equitable society – the ultimate goal of social justice.

Climate Witness, designed as a platform through which to collect campaigning material while also reducing participants’ vulnerability to climate change impacts, FIME as a quintessential environmental conservation initiative, and the kuta project with a heavy focus on environmental services in poverty reduction and alleviation have different conservation agenda. The primary convergence in these projects (apart from being implemented by WWF) at the international level is that they have a community focus and are implemented through CBNRM methodology. In Fiji, these projects have a second point of convergence, ethnic undertones in their beneficiary base. The fact that these ‘projects of hope’ only allow indigenous Fijians to hope is a particular aspect of WWF-SPPO that is most likely an expression of WWF-SPPOs ethnically biased staffing. WWF-SPPO’s local conservation staff are embedded in Fiji’s socio-economic and political milieu. They are as much subjects of the society that they live in as western conservationists are of the societies that they live in. WWF-SPPO staff, by virtue of becoming agents of an international environmental non-profit at their employment with the organization do not cease to be subjects of Fiji’s society, their culture and heritage. Their social and economic opinions and biases become evident in how they carry out their professional work. Kabara, the thirty seven indigenous Fijian villages of the Great
Sea Reef coastline, and the villagers of Navakasobu were the fortunate beneficiaries of WWF CBNRM, mediated and implemented by what is essentially an indigenous Fijian WWF-SPPO. Others who shared the same vulnerabilities, the Dunns, the tens of thousands of Indo-Fijian farmers and fishermen of the Great Sea Reef coastline, and the Indo-Fijian farmers who are neighbors of the kuta ponds and share the kuta environment are already invisible vulagi in state discourse, and remained as invisible others, even within a framework that holds the hope and promise of social justice for the disempowered – CBNRM.

**STATUS-QUO**

**Structural Conflicts in an International Environmental Non-Profit**

WWF-SPPO is not a stand-alone organization. It is embedded in a wider international and national framework that puts constraints on its independence from the get-go. Neither WWF-SPPOs work-plan nor budget are sourced independently. The projects that are implemented by WWF-SPPO are subprojects of larger initiatives undertaken by the wider WWF network. In order to maintain its annual budget WWF-SPPO must engage with and implement the initiatives undertaken by the WWF network. There is little space for independence when one’s purse strings are tied to a larger benefactor. Where WWF-SPPO does have independence is in the manner with which it implements this already defined work program. While the WWF network and the availability of funds may dictate what work is carried out, the actual sites at which the work is carried out, the species targeted and the beneficiaries of the work are the prerogative of WWF-SPPO and its staff. As discussed in the preceding section, the staff, by virtue of being the mediators between the international and the national, have large sway in the manner in which projects are carried out. WWF-SPPO staff being, for the most part indigenous Fijian, would understandably have empathy for fellow indigenous Fijians, which manifests in WWF-SPPOs ethnically biased and exclusionary beneficiary base.

WWF-SPPO’s most senior staff, such as the Representative, have until recently been foreigners. Given that the work of the organization is vetted by a senior staff member, who is not embedded in Fiji’s society, a certain level of ethnic independence could (and
should) be expected. However, there is no evidence of this type of censorship in the
discourse presented by WWF-SPPO. In the case of some foreign staff, they simply are in
the country for too short a period to acquire any appreciation for the nuance and prejudice
in Fiji’s national discourse on belonging and rights (environmental, political, social or
otherwise). Some others, even though they have spent some considerable time in Fiji
belong more to a social fabric of transient conservationists and expatriate experts rather
than within the social fabric of the society in which they work. They insulate themselves
from the polarized and tense socio-political discourse of Fiji. Others consider themselves
conservationists and independent agents whose expertise lies in their technical fields of
expertise and not as agents of social censorship or change. The irony is that they often
oversee the implementation of work programs that have biased socio-political agendas.
Images of an ideal community, outdated and debunked as they are, still prevail in
conservation circles and provide a backdrop for the lack of engagement of foreign WWF
staff in issues of ethnic equity at WWF-SPPO. The robust scholarship and critique of
CBNRM that has developed over the last two to three decades is not readily available to
conservationists for many reasons. Firstly, conservation still continues to draw much of
its staffing core from the natural sciences, and thus these conservationists have not had
exposure to the social science academic literature on CBNRM. Secondly,
conservationists outside of academia, such as working for WWF, often do not have ready
access to academic literature. Any academic literature that is made available tends to be
to literature pertaining to issues related to biological conservation rather than social issues
related to conservation. The dominance of the natural sciences in nature conservation
despite the changes that have taken place in the area of conservation and conservation
delivery make social issues relating to conservation an issue for an interested few rather
than a component of mainstream conservation. As a result WWF-SPPOs foreign staff
have not provided a buffer against the local staff predilection towards an ethnically
biased programme.

WWF-International’s own mode of operation, working in partnership with governments,
and WWF-SPPO being dependent on the Government of Fiji for the Memorandum of
Understanding that allows the organization to operate in the country also constrain the
ability of the organization to present any real challenge to national discourse on social
issues. At an organizational level it is unlikely that anyone would want to rock the political boat to the extent of undermining or endangering the Memorandum of Understanding of operation, its tax exempt status, the ability to procure visas for foreign staff, tax exemptions of foreign staff, etcetera. Given these considerations, WWF-SPPOs ability to provide a counter-narrative or voice to the state’s discourse is limited.

Old Feet in New Shoes - Villains in New CBNRM ‘Fortresses’

If traditional conservation demonized community, CBNRM demonizes non-community. Thus, many of the shortcomings of traditional ‘fortress’ type conservation are becoming recreated through CBNRM. For example, through FIME, WWF is recreating fortress-type conservation in the guise of CBNRM. The underlying assumption of FIME is that local fishers are unrestrained exploiters of the inshore marine resource and must be alienated from the resource for the benefit of the global commons and future generations. Had FIME been implemented in a traditional conservation model of implementation, WWF would have worked with the state to declare a National Park of the Great Sea Reef and its coast, thereby restricting use of the fishery. But because FIME is being implemented using a ‘community-based’ framework, WWF has worked with that segment of the community that holds collective-choice level rights to the resource to restrict use of the fishery, primarily by non-resource-owners. Thus, just as the previous mode of conservation did not take into account the myriad relationships between ‘the community’ and their environment, WWF-CBNRM does not take into consideration the myriad ties that non-resource-owning fishermen have to the Great Sea Reef. There has been little consideration of how to alleviate the possible economic pressures that FIME will place on the local, small-time fishing community, or, in fact whether this community has had much to do with the decline in the state of the resource to begin with. The primary difference between FIME being implemented using a traditional conservation methodology and CBNRM was on who collaborated with WWF to erect the fortress.

WWF-SPPO has also struggled to deal with the tension that exists between developmental outcomes and conservation outcomes. For example, the FIME initiative’s success depends on putting some fishermen out of their jobs. Inherently, the very success
of FIME, that is the conservation impact of FIME, depends on negative development outcomes. FIME’s emphasis on Marine Protected Areas in qoliqoli put marine resource conservation ahead of the livelihoods of local fishers. The kuta project had more balanced conservation and developmental goals from the outset. The project was successful in providing Navakasobu with a near-sustainable source of alternative income by partially restoring the kuta ponds. From a conservation standpoint, it seems the organization’s main failure was in gaining an understanding of kuta’s natural ecosystem before trying to recreate as much as possible of the same. However, from a social justice perspective, the organization fell well short of what would be expected from a CBNRM project. WWF’s strategy of fencing off the kuta ponds, and laying blame for pond degradation on sugarcane farmers merely created a ‘fortressed’ kuta pond.

CBNRM revolutionized the manner in which human-nature relationships were seen by mainstream environmentalism. This revolution was by no means a small one; the recognition that in rural settings, humans, and their communities are very much a part of the environment, and vice versa has allowed many communities the opportunity to continue to derive sustenance from their environment even when their environment became ‘conserved’. The community that CBNRM found, however, was a very particular, romanticized view of human society. The imaginings of community by CBNRM practitioners has gone on to marginalize other groups of people, people who are nomadic, migrants, and people who have not framed themselves within the imagining of ‘community.’ In order to deliver on its promise of social justice, CBNRM needs to expand its imaginings of community to encompass groups that seem less romantic, such as migrant farmers and commercial fishers, who for all matters of purpose also live close to their resources and are often disempowered. One WWF staff member described the motivation to engage in CBNRM as “it is the people, and how you can contribute to the wellbeing of those people through a project of hope.” However, as we have seen in all three projects discussed, the definition of who is counted as ‘people’ as ‘community’ and as ‘belonging’ are a particular and peculiar aspect of WWF CBNRM. As a result, the array of stakeholders who were given the opportunity to ‘hope’ was narrow and exclusionary. The three examples that have been considered suggest that WWF CBNRM
has a particular affinity for the ‘wellbeing’ of indigenous Fijian stakeholders, at the cost of others who are in equally dire predicaments.

**MOVING FORWARD**

CBNRM has brought empowerment to many rural people throughout the world, especially the developing world. For rural people in Fiji to realize the true benefits of CBNRM, and for CBNRM in Fiji to be the powerful social justice tool it has the potential to be, practitioners need to reconsider how community is conceived, constructed, and articulated. Community can be articulated in many ways and indigeneity is but one articulation. People-resource relationships is another. In Fiji, CBNRM may be better served to consider community to be a localized group of people with strong, immediate ties to a resource – whether these ties be as resource owners, resource users, or tenants. The current historical definition of community could be to some extent re-placed by a more geographical community, a community which shares not only timeless history but a historical and current geography. A purely place-based community, although capturing agents who are currently invisible in CBNRM would likely hinder the participation of distant and nomadic agents. However, it is essential that community be re-imagined to include place-based people-resource relationships, especially in places such as Fiji where historical people-resource relationships can become ethnically divisive and exclusionary. Until community is re-imagined, CBNRM in Fiji will continue to be defined by ethnic differentiation. A first step towards such a reimagining would be for WWF-SPPO to diversify its staffing to represent more of the ethnic diversity of Fiji. Providing a framework for this reimagining will be an agenda for another work.
APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Guiding questions for talanoa-style interviews with WWF-SPPO project staff

Can you briefly describe the project and its history, where it is located, who is involved?

Who was the project designed by?

How many implementing staff, including yourself, has the project had? Were you all involved in the project at the same time or were different implementers involved at different times?

How did the community in which the project was implemented become involved in the project? (That is, did the project choose the community or the community request the project?)

At which point of the project design process did the community become involved?

How and why was this group selected as the main stakeholder or beneficiary of the project?

Are there any other stakeholder groups to the resource in question? To what extent and in what ways are they involved in the project?

What do you feel are the goals of CBNRM and the project?

Do you feel that these goals are appropriate to Fiji?

How do you personally feel about these goals?

In your opinion how successful has the project been in achieving these goals?

In your opinion, how has the project been perceived by stakeholders?
In your opinion, how has this project been perceived by WWF’s partners in the NGO community and government?

**Guiding questions for talanoa interviews at Navakasobu village (kuta project site)**

**Village profile**

Demography of the village, number of houses, number of people by age and gender.

What resources are owned by the village?

Main sources of income, subsistence, cash income. How many people work outside the village? Doing what?

Income from alternative sources such as leases and remittances?

What role does the ponds play in the village income?

Are there any cane farms in the village land? Are they owned by people living in the village or are they leased? Who are they leased to? Obtain a history here, any leases in the past? Have the leases been renewed? If yes why and if no why?

**On the Pond and the Project**

Is the pond owned/controlled by anyone?

Is the kuta owned/controlled by anyone?

Who makes decisions about the management of the pond?

Do any village or non-village activities affect the pond or your use of the pond?

Who makes decisions about these activities?

List all the claimants to the pond.
Do you have a relationship with these other claimants? Has this relationship been in any way affected by the WWF project? If yes, how?

List all the uses and users of the pond.

How has the WWF project affected the pond.

Has the project affected your use of the pond and your claim to it?

What are your main sources of income?

Do you think you have benefited from this project?

Who else has benefited by it?

Do you think anyone has been disadvantaged because of the project?

On weaving

How many women weave?

How does the art of weaving get passed down?

Is there a guardian?

Who is allowed to weave? Are there restrictions on who can weave?

For what reasons do you weave? For traditional events/obligations or for income or both? Any other reasons?

Do you have any other sources of income?

How much income do you make from weaving?
The money that is made from weaving, how is it allocated collected? Are products sold as a collective or individually? Who controls the income from sales? What does the income get spent on?

Was kuta used for anything other than weaving?

Can kuta become a long-term alternative livelihood for people of this area? If yes, who are these people?
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