

Governance, Corruption, and Ethics in the Pacific

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The governance agenda came to the Pacific in the 1990s as a “polite” way of dealing with corruption. It originated from the World Bank’s assessment that a failing and inadequate political environment was the underlying cause for sub-Saharan Africa’s unsuccessful response to structural adjustment reform. In the Pacific, the governance agenda has been taken up by the region’s main bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as by international agencies. They have been concerned about the region’s lack of sustained economic development (particularly, its lack of consistent growth); its rising political instability; the increasingly visible mismanagement of public funds in many countries; and an upsurge in the so-called ideology of traditionalism. The recipe put forward to cure these ills, in the Pacific as in Africa, has been to promote liberal democracy, the rule of law, government workforce reduction (“right-sizing”), and more open markets.

The donors and international agencies are not mistaken about the deteriorating political and economic conditions in the region, and they certainly have a role to play in (if not a debt toward) assisting Pacific Island countries to enhance governance and socioeconomic development. However, real transparency on the part of the agencies would require them to assess and publicize their motivations in promoting the governance agenda. A more explicit explanation of why greater democratization and economic liberalization in the Pacific suit their interests and an honest assessment of how they may benefit Pacific Island states would be a start. A second step would be to work in tandem with Pacific Island communities to build a more prosperous and harmonious future. This would require listening to alternative views and becoming serious about dealing with the social consequences of economic and financial change. Since it is

unlikely the agencies will take the lead on this, it falls to regional academics to deconstruct the agenda, and to help explore alternative ways of achieving better governance.

Many aspects of the governance agenda in the Pacific have already been critiqued,¹ but little has been said about the agenda's silence on the causes and manifestations of corruption in the Pacific, and its inability to reach beyond standardized corrective measures to governance problems. The lack of attention to the causes of corruption is a major flaw in the agenda, which was designed to fix corruption in the first place. How can it aspire to "fix" a problem if it doesn't know what the root causes of the problem are? Little in-depth analysis on corruption in the region has emerged; instead, the tendency is to assume that the basis for corruption lies in culture or tradition. Fingers are generally pointed at tribal, clanic, and family ties; the lack of a national identity and of a developed and effective contractual civil society; and "bloated" civil services that lack a public service ethic. Ultimately, "Africanisation," or the development of a "culture of political corruption" (LeVine 1993, 274, quoted in Szeftel 1998, 223), is seen as the destiny of the Pacific.²

The second major flaw in the governance agenda is its almost exclusive reliance on western thought and the accompanying policy of political and economic liberalism. Proponents of the agenda fail to sufficiently question how liberal democracies actually function today. This is particularly so with respect to the subservience of present-day democracies to market forces, which has led to widening social inequalities, a general deficit of political participation, and an increasing role of wealth in determining electoral outcomes. Some debate takes place in liberal democracies regarding how to address this situation (although in the United States, for instance, this is not a mainstream debate). But so far, the governance agenda has done little to provoke substantive thought about what political values and systems would best serve contemporary Pacific societies. At best it has reluctantly accommodated "native" institutions, some of which may be more reflective of the colonial heritage and the interests of entrenched elites than of contemporary indigenous or native values. Because these indigenous institutions are too powerful and useful to be done away with and often serve to stabilize the polity, supporting them is in the interest of the donors and (at least in the short term) of society at large. Yet the agenda's reliance on legislative, bureaucratic, and economic reform is unlikely to succeed in dealing with the region's real ills: a lack of political participation, especially at the national level; growing socio-

economic disparities; and a sense of cultural vulnerability to globalization and other influences. All of these foster a climate in which malgovernance thrives.

Dealing with these inadequacies requires a two-pronged approach: first, to suggest approaches to evaluate corruption in the region; and second, to make a case for the promotion of Pacific political ethics as a way of dealing with corruption and wider malgovernance. Before attempting to do this, a few words are in order about why the area of Pacific political values has not yet been a major focus of research. Most political scientists in the Pacific have been nonnative. Our limited understanding of Pacific cultures and languages has kept us from even beginning to understand indigenous political conceptualization. It has always been easier to look at institutions, events, happenings, systems, and so on. One disincentive (applicable to native and nonnative scholars alike) has been the complexity and sensitivity of the subject matter itself. In addition, native scholars who could have done this kind of work have shied away from it for various reasons, including pressure from nonnative professors to focus on problems and issues from a western perspective. Until recently Pacific scholars may also have felt that there was little value or reward in studying their own cultures in the area of political theory. The study of non-western societies has traditionally been considered to belong to the realm of anthropology rather than political science. Political theory offerings have generally focused on western theory, from that of the early Greeks to philosopher John Rawls and his contemporaries.³ Little encouragement has been given to students of other cultures to explore their societies' contributions to philosophical thought. A glaring example of this was the University of the South Pacific (USP)—the leading tertiary institution for Pacific Islands students who subsequently work in their home islands—which did not offer a single course in Pacific Islands philosophy or ethics until 2004.⁴

ASSESSING CORRUPTION IN THE PACIFIC

To date, therefore, relatively little in-depth scholarly writing on corruption in the Pacific is available. Only two authors, Peter Larmour and Ron Crocombe, have written overviews of corruption in the region. In articles focused on governance or politics, many scholars have touched on corruption without making it their main focus.⁵ In addition, a few book-

length case studies have been published—in particular, the assessment of the collapse of the National Bank of Fiji by Roman Grynberg, Doug Munro, and Michael White (2002), and Kalafi Moala’s indictment of Tongan politics (2002)—both of which recount instances of corruption and mismanagement.⁶ However, most of these works are essentially descriptive rather than analytical and therefore teach us little about corruption beyond the different forms it takes in various parts of the region. Another (equally descriptive) source of information providing examples of corruption can be found in the numerous official reports issued by ombudspersons and auditors-general (among others) in many countries of the region.⁷

Without going into a detailed critique of the above works, it seems useful to very briefly discuss the approaches of the two authors who have endeavored to assess corruption regionally. Larmour’s 1997 discussion paper, “Corruption and Governance in the South Pacific,” looks at how corruption articulates with other aspects of governance in the region. Unsurprisingly, the paper begins with the topic of tradition, and moves on to “kinship, nationalism, and identity,” but also looks at the roles of privatization and aid, and the issue of sovereignty, among other things. Although this study shows that corruption can be explained in part by any one of these factors, it does not appear to favor one explanation over the others and does not suggest new avenues for more thorough analysis of corruption in the region.

A full chapter of Crocombe’s impressive latest edition of *The South Pacific* is devoted to corruption (2001, 512–541). The chapter is a disheartening if not frightening (and altogether too real) litany of corrupt acts carried out by politicians, civil servants, and members of the private sector in most countries of the region, and of the settings in which corruption takes place (the logging industry; customs, immigration and police departments; political parties; government cabinets; etc). It also provides a list of reasons why such behavior takes place and why it is rarely sanctioned:

- (1) a lack of “ethics of those with responsibility”
- (2) an unwillingness to “denounce or prosecute those who are corrupt, for exposing others is seen as mean in close-knit societies”
- (3) a lack of truly “independent checking mechanisms”
- (4) the “grey area” between custom and corruption
- (5) abuse of affirmative action policies

- (6) the prevalence of slush funds and of nepotism
- (7) secrecy surrounding campaign financing
- (8) bribing of voters (Crocombe 2001, 514–530)

Notably, Crocombe concluded this chapter by stating, “A basic problem is to adapt ethical systems designed for small kin-based groups, to function effectively in increasingly impersonal, mobile societies” (2001, 540). He identified the smallness of the societies and their cultural heritage as contributing causes for corruption in many cases. But one could state that the corrupt actions described are not so different from those carried out in many other parts of the world, including industrialized nations, though they may differ in degree, prevalence, and lack of sanctions. Crocombe also commented, “The status of politicians has probably declined around the world, but perhaps more in the Pacific Islands than in most places, owing to the surge of corruption and poor management” (2001, 528). This may be accurate but difficult to prove. For instance, the rates of participation in elections are generally higher in the Pacific than in the United States and in various European countries where participation is not compulsory. But if for the sake of argument we were to accept Crocombe’s comment as accurate, we could possibly attribute Pacific people’s disenchantment with politicians to the following: (1) they are closely tied to those engaging in corruption (though this could both be to people’s advantage or disadvantage, depending on whether or not they benefit from corrupt acts); (2) they, more than residents in larger, metropolitan countries, are directly affected by corruption, because funds are limited and access to cash is restricted; and (3) they often feel helpless, because of confusion or lack of information available to them about ethical standards, and because of the lack of sanctions taken against corruption.

In addition, Crocombe’s concluding comment could be turned around to say that because corruption is rife in the United States as well as in the Pacific Islands (although forms of corruption differ), ethical standards designed for industrial democracies must be substantially improved, strengthened, or better adapted to smaller societies that depend partly or mainly on subsistence. At the same time, ethical systems that are specific to Pacific societies must be better understood and reevaluated for contemporary purposes.

Because no satisfactory framework for analyzing corruption in the Pacific context has been developed, it seems useful to turn now to the more general literature on corruption and assess how it informs the gov-

ernance agenda in the Pacific. Another useful exercise, urgently needed in the region, is to find out how people of all sections of society define and understand corruption, and how they think it can be dealt with. That will require substantial research and is not the objective of this paper; instead, I focus on the different schools of thought about corruption and discuss how the lenses through which the issue is viewed influence assumptions about corruption as well as the governance agenda itself.

TRENDS IN THINKING ABOUT CORRUPTION

In his 1999 article “New Concepts for Old?” Robert Williams illustrated how corruption has been defined, successively, in moral, legal, public-office or public-interest, and finally, economic terms. The *moral* explanation, he stated, has been “largely eschewed” by “modern social science” and thus has generally been ignored in contemporary writing on corruption (Williams 1999, 504). In part, it has been ruled out of the equation because of the religious connotations attached to the idea of morality. Also, there was a time when corruption wasn’t seen as entirely negative: apologists for corruption saw it as a way to “cut red tape” or undercut oppressive states, or even as a necessary, unavoidable step on the road to modernization.⁸ Such a view undercut the moralist position on the issue.⁹

The *legal* explanation has sought to define corruption as something that occurs outside of rules and laws. But because laws differ from country to country and do not necessarily or adequately represent society as a whole (but rather, mainly, the “politically powerful” [Williams 1999, 505]),¹⁰ the legal definition has had limited scope. In many developing countries, laws regulating public life may not even exist or may be so outdated to be of limited value. One example is the charities law under which non-governmental organizations operate in Fiji, and which the Qarase government has used as a way to undermine the Citizens Constitutional Forum, reinforce the government’s position, and constrain legitimate demands for greater transparency. As Crocombe aptly put it: “Legally, corruption is what the law of each nation says it is, but much ethically corrupt action is taken within the law. In fact some of the worst is by those who claim to be ‘fully professional’ and who by legal manipulations, keep out of jail while enriching themselves at the expense of others” (2001, 512).

The *public-office* definition (which, according to Williams, was prevalent in the literature on corruption from the 1960s to the 1980s) employs the distinction between the public and private realms (a strong feature in

the development of modern western polities), to show that corruption is behavior that deviates from a public servant's formal duties in the interest of monetary or status gains for an individual, close family, or inner circle (Nye 1967, 419, cited in Williams 1999, 505). Williams acknowledged that this definition is appealing because it "speaks directly to official conduct and the centrality of duty; it seems to embrace bribery, nepotism and embezzlement . . . and, unlike a narrowly legal approach, it appears to offer the possibility of meaningful comparative analysis" (1999, 505). However, as Williams further noted, the difficulty with this definition is that it assumes that the public interest, and public and private roles, are clearly established and distinguishable. In reality the opposite is often true: public interest may be determined or manipulated by the politically powerful, and in many societies it is not easy to determine where private and public roles begin and end. These distinctions are sometimes hard to make in the Pacific. For instance, it has been demonstrated that in Sāmoa the idea of a private sphere (particularly in politics) is not well developed (Huffer and So'o 2000; 2003).¹¹ In addition, public opinion, which plays a role in defining corruption, is not always monolithic (Williams 1999, 506–507), well informed, or well organized.¹² In the Pacific, lack of access to reliable information (particularly analytical and investigative journalism) is a real constraint.

Corruption as seen through an *economic* prism gained considerable prominence in the 1990s. It is this view that international financial institutions, the US government, and other donors subscribe to. This perspective was developed in part in response to the "corruption eruption" in the developed countries (Williams 1999, 506),¹³ coinciding with a period of increasing promotion of economic liberalism throughout the world. In simple terms, this definition portrays the government as operating like a private business monopoly (Williams 1999, 507), and corruption as essentially rent-seeking behavior.¹⁴ Rent-seeking is pursuing "returns in excess of a resource owner's opportunity costs" (Williams 1999, 507), in other words, taking advantage of a situation to maximize short-term profits to the detriment of other economic actors. It occurs because governments have, according to the theory, excessive control over resources and markets. As Williams pointed out, underlying this perspective is the assumption that individuals are "driven by self-interest," which they seek to maximize (1999, 507). This view also relies on the "constraint conception" of human nature, which emphasizes human limitations and foibles (Antony 2003). This particular assumption about human behavior shapes much of

liberal thought and has in large part led to the western or modern emphasis on negative rights (eg, freedom from abuse or coercion and the right to private property),¹⁵ on the separation of powers, and on frameworks for monitoring and controlling the roles and actions of officials. This negative view of human nature is also central to the governance agenda. But is it a notion held by Pacific Islands peoples and societies? In the section on Pacific political ethics I return to the question of applying such universal assumptions to particular areas.

In his critique of the governance and anti-corruption agenda in Africa, Morris Szeftel has argued that the agenda followed almost naturally from the international banks' policies of structural adjustment and reform.¹⁶ Based on the latter, international financial institutions viewed the state as the problem, that is, they considered state regulations to be largely responsible for Africa's economic woes. From there it was only a short step to equate state regulations with rent seeking (whether legal or illegal) and with corruption. The international financial institutions therefore began advocating for the "unrestrained" power of the state to be curtailed both economically and politically. These institutions and other international agencies have come to the conclusion that economic growth requires democratization and liberalization (although this conclusion is based on a model of cause and effect that is more a matter of faith than of hard data).¹⁷ In other words, they assume that "the liberal economy needs a liberal state" and that, hand in hand, these two forces will address the problem of corruption (Szeftel 1998, 226).

Paradoxically, behind such conceptions on the part of donor states and international institutions lies the following uncomfortable thought: if political and economic liberalization fail to deal with corruption, corruption will further undermine liberal democratization and lead to continued erosion of public trust. The economic view of corruption has come about not so much as a result of a better understanding of the needs and specific circumstances of developing countries, but more out of the West's concern to promote and protect its way of life. It needs the rest of the world to accept free market access and to react in predictable ways. It also needs a constant strengthening of democratization worldwide to ensure and enhance representative democracy at home and to be able to counter various extremist political voices around the world.

When assessing and dealing with corruption in the Pacific, we need to be cognizant of how these different schools of thought have evolved and what worldviews frame them.¹⁸ We should also remember that many (if

not all) of the organizations issuing corruption indices (used by the World Bank to justify and determine policy) rely on surveys or opinions of firms conducting business in those countries. They rarely, if ever, draw on in-country research conducted with local communities.

Further, the economic view of corruption and governance does not sufficiently acknowledge the danger that privatization and deregulation may *increase* corruption rather than decrease it. For instance, in Sāmoa, moves have been made toward greater corporatization of services—a sort of intermediary step between state and private ownership. These corporations, essentially public firms run as private businesses, are, according to their bylaws, not accountable to Parliament; their accounts are viewed only by their board and by cabinet. As Crocombe noted, “The problem with politicians managing public assets is that they want benefits before the next election, whereas the public interest requires managers with a long time horizon and concern for public interest. The problem is not, however, necessarily solved by transferring ownership to businessmen. . . . The worst combination, which is promoted by the international banks and already adopted in a number of [Pacific] countries, is to retain government-ownership but let private businessmen manage such corporations. They can then use a public asset for their private benefit, and often do, to public detriment” (2001, 548).

Another problem in the fight against corruption is the creation of nongovernmental organizations, which tend to constitute an artificial, urban-based, contractual “civil society,” disconnected from peri-urban and rural communities, if not from society at large.¹⁹ This is not to say that many such organizations aren’t useful, but they risk becoming a distraction when they monopolize the debate with government and may also hamper other, more representative voices from being heard. Governments may consider consultation with nongovernmental organizations sufficient and therefore neglect sustained interaction with communities and the citizenry. In addition, many nongovernmental organizations are closely tied to international organizations and donors.²⁰ This potentially alienates them from local communities, which hold their own worldviews, and provides easy ammunition to conservative governments that consider them foreign impositions.

Implicit in views of corruption that emphasize rent seeking or public versus private interests and roles lie the assumptions that developing countries are not fully equipped to deal with corruption and that their cultures

are at fault. As Szeftel wrote, “It is a premise that chimes with anti-corruption measures adopted by the governance agenda, an assumption that values of honesty and transparency must be ‘taught’ through the pressures imposed by globalization and by persuasion, conferences, educational materials and, if necessary, sanctions and public condemnation. This kind of view is found in much western writing about corruption in non-western societies. The literature on corruption in Asia, for instance, devotes much space to traditions of gift-giving, family solidarity and deference against which ‘foreign’ notions of honesty must contend” (1998, 236). This is also how corruption is often approached in the Pacific. What is less discussed is the lack of adaptability on the part of institutions, both those of representative democracy and those remaining as a legacy of colonialism. For instance, in the governance agenda, there is little talk of the decline of parliaments in the running of public affairs in western democracies, and the consequent lack of public participation in the running of government (Fleming and Holland 2001). Instead, Pacific parliamentarians just receive training on how to better carry out their jobs, and parliamentary libraries are given technical assistance and money to buy books. This is akin to applying a Band-Aid to a bleeding six-inch gash.

Because all of the above explanations have their own historical conceptual baggage and do not provide satisfactory answers about how corruption should be analyzed, we must seek answers elsewhere. Perhaps we should begin by asking ourselves questions about the nature of corruption in the Pacific. One such question, reflected in the title of a book chapter by Oskar Kurer (2001), could be, “Why Do Voters Support Corrupt Politicians?” In his attempt to respond to this question, Kurer examined a range of explanations (including the cultural one), which he then dismissed, settling for what he called reasons of demand and supply. On the demand side, he pinpointed three areas: voter ignorance, inconsistent preferences, and the collective-action dilemma. Ignorance includes people’s inability to imagine an alternative system, lack of knowledge of the extent and the detrimental effects of corruption, or difficulties in discerning the corrupt or noncorrupt intentions of those standing for election. Inconsistent preferences refers to the fact that although voters view corruption as “materially disadvantageous and morally repugnant, and express their feelings in anticorruption statements—at the same time they believe it is advantageous and morally justified to avail themselves of the opportunity it opens” (2000, 79). The collective-action dilemma states that people

choose politicians because, although they may dislike them, they feel that not choosing them may be too risky, if the majority of voters choose those politicians anyway.²¹ Kurer's supply-side explanation focuses on barriers to entering politics, including high opportunity costs, faced by officials who are *not* corrupt (2001, 77–82). Whether or not we accept Kurer's model, one important area he has suggested for further research is how people perceive corruption compared with how institutions actually function: "Empirical evidence that compares subjective voters' assessments and objective criteria is . . . entirely missing" (Kurer 2001, 77). This would be a useful direction for research on corruption in the Pacific.

Also relevant to the situation in the Pacific is this commentary by Kurer: "The question of why voters support corrupt politicians has not been a popular one. One reason for its unpopularity could be the uncomfortable implications that emerge for the 'good governance' debate. It jeopardizes the comfortable assumption that corruption is unrelated to the electoral process and implies that in many cases administrative reforms, and even the reduction of entry barriers, are unlikely to yield the results promised by their designers. Fighting corruption becomes the eminently political task of transforming political culture in the widest sense" (2001, 83).

Assuming people want to transform or enhance political culture in the Pacific,²² we must first reach a better understanding of Pacific political thought and ethics. Although there may be sufficient parallels to say something about the region as a whole (see Huffer and Qalo 2004), political thought and ethics will vary from community to community, from country to country. It is a good idea, therefore, to start exploring a community or a country at a time. We should ask such questions as: What do people expect from their institutions, leaders, and systems? What do they hold to be politically "good"? What is corruption, in their view? Did corruption occur in the traditional context? How was it dealt with? We should not try to answer these questions without participation of people from all sectors of society. This should not be an empty exercise in which the answers become the property of researchers and have no impact on society; rather, communities should fully participate in the process of determining what is important and politically valuable to them, and researchers should be responsible for articulating and publicizing the results in close collaboration with the communities.

This brings us to the area of ethics, which must be developed more fully before understanding why it may be useful in the process of political transformation.

PACIFIC POLITICAL ETHICS

Calum R Paton, in his 1992 book *Ethics and Politics, Theory and Practice*, said that the first question of ethics is, “What does good or right mean?” and the second question is, “What sort of *things* are good and right?” He explained that the first question is “answered universally”—all societies are concerned with good or right—and that the focus of the second question, “the content of good and right,” varies “over time or across societies” in how it is interpreted and acted out (1992, 60).²³ The main dilemma for ethics and moral philosophy, then, is to reconcile universalist or “absolutist” views with relativist, particularist, pluralist perspectives. In simple terms, the absolutists ask, if there are no standards by which all humankind can be judged, of what use are standards? If we cannot say, for instance, that all human beings deserve basic human rights, how can the idea of human rights be useful? The relativists say that all cultures vary and no one should decide for others what is right or good for them.²⁴ Common sense generally dictates that a satisfying answer lies somewhere in between, and many moral philosophers have argued for that position. But it still poses a dilemma for moral philosophy, particularly since, as Jim Tiles put it, “The central question to be addressed in the systematic study of ethics is, ‘what basis, if any, do people have for approving or condemning the practices of other people?’” (2000, 1).

Why is this debate relevant to the Pacific? Simply because the governance agenda and the economic discourse on corruption are underpinned by the notion that there are universal values that apply to all societies. The ethical stance taken by donors is steeped in western philosophy, considered universal and therefore applicable to all equally. The problem with this, as Samuel Fleischacker pointed out in *The Ethics of Culture* (1994), is that from the Enlightenment onward the western tradition has refused to acknowledge its basis in a particular “story,” that is, a particular history, tradition, and culture.²⁵ “The West may constitute a distinctive culture, but its unwillingness to *admit* that it is a distinctive culture has deprived it of much of the ethical power that other cultures have in their societies” (Fleischacker 1994, 215; emphasis in original). In other words, by assuming that it is not on the same footing as other cultural traditions and that it has in fact dismissed tradition or risen above it, western thinking has become domineering, even though it may be well-meaning in many ways. This also applies to the governance agenda and the

battle against corruption waged by the international banks and donors. An example is the emphasis placed on the deliberate construction of a civil society that is unrelated to and often outside Pacific cultural norms.

Another difficulty with the absolutist tendencies that underpin the governance agenda is the unwillingness to accept alternative political thought or ethics that are grounded in local culture. Following on from the colonial legacy, donors (in particular the metropolitan powers) and international institutions have been reluctant to provide room for the expression of political thinking that may represent neither their own views nor those of native but colonially derived institutions (such as the Council of Chiefs in Fiji). This has led to a lack of political debate and to a manipulation of core values by entrenched elites with whom accommodation has been sought (to varying extents in different countries) from colonial times until today. Metropolitan countries and international institutions have favored an attitude of what Fleischacker terms “charity” rather than “respect” with Pacific Islands countries: “When we seek the well-being of all individuals, the good as we construe it, then we are pursuing charity. . . . When we seek the freedom of all individuals, distancing ourselves from them enough to let them define what they construe as good . . . then we are pursuing respect” (1994, 178). It is this notion of charity that permeates the view that corruption is culture-related and that Pacific Islanders must be taught to establish standards set by the rule of law and by codes of conduct designed beyond their shores. If we were to compare the corruption of two police forces, for instance, one in New York and one in Fiji, it would never occur to anyone to say that a New York policeman should forget his cultural affiliations or background, but it wouldn’t be surprising to hear that said of the Fijian policeman.²⁶ No one has suggested that Americans change their cultural traditions in light of the Enron case, but we frequently hear that Fijians, Tongans, or ni-Vanuatu must change their culture and attitudes before they have any chance of dealing with corruption. These kinds of double standards are implicit in the governance agenda’s attitudes to politics and to corruption in the Pacific (and elsewhere).

Does this mean that Pacific Islanders must prove that they have their own brand of political ethics? No, but it shows that if Pacific communities want to be able to set their own political agenda, they (and we as responsible academics) should engage in a debate about the political concepts and values they hold. This debate should also quickly become cross-cultural so that Pacific communities are able to articulate their agenda to the international community.

It is also obvious that corruption cannot be dealt with by imposing rules that people don't feel are relevant or significant. As argued by Kate Gillespie and Gwenn Okruhlik: "Scholars agree that no cleanup measure can be effective unless it is supported by the ethical norms of society. . . . Corruption thrives in an environment where there is no consensus on what it is. An important corrective, then, is a common standard of morality" (1991, 80). In order to identify a common standard of morality in the Pacific (or in the respective countries of the Pacific), we need to start looking at what people hold to be important.

Ethics should be seen as an "action-guiding code" (Fleischacker 1994, 15), constituted by peoples' values, which are in turn nourished by their histories, traditions, and the changes they have experienced. But before designing this code, communities must have the opportunity to examine, evaluate, and express their values. This can be accomplished at different levels.

Much more research is required on Pacific political thought, through both reviewing existing literature and working with people throughout the region. In a paper entitled "Have We Been Thinking Upside Down? The Contemporary Emergence of Pacific Theoretical Thought" (2004), Ropate Qalo and I examined work carried out by Pacific scholars including theologians, educators, native and indigenous sociologists and anthropologists (often employing interdisciplinary approaches), and by local communities seeking to assert Pacific, national, or local worldviews in churches, schools, government, and other venues. Additional sources not mentioned in that paper that provide an important commentary on Pacific values are contemporary literature, art, and film. Although none of these areas are directly political, it is possible to derive political principles from them.

Because in the Pacific there is a tradition of "discretion" regarding political matters, it is not always easy to engage in a debate about political values. It is therefore important to find ways of working with communities that are comfortable for participants and where the benefits are mutual. A good example of this is David Welchman Gegeo and Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo's documenting of the Kwara'ae Genealogy Project; another is Qalo's documentation of his family's business, the Mucunabitu Iron Works (see Huffer and Qalo 2004). In both these cases close links (including kinship) bind the scholar and the community. More such collaborative ventures are needed. While they may not tell us directly about political views or how people feel about national government, they can inform us about ethical attitudes toward what the international community calls development. They can also help define ethical standards, based on ideas

of what the “good life” is, how it is attained, and how it may be destroyed; how people should conduct themselves in business; how wealth should be distributed; how family (in the extended sense) should be included in the running of business; and so on. Collaborative research projects such as these can be valuable exercises in both philosophical and practical terms, and should be recognized and encouraged. If international banks and donors are really interested in seeking out people’s views of development and their ethical standards, they should look first toward this type of research and community efforts. Poverty and corruption are less likely to occur in communities that engage in self-reflection and self-help than in those where values have been destroyed or distorted by what are often paternalistic and standardized policies (and by those with leaders who have been co-opted by the lure of money).²⁷

Another example of a self-reliant approach (also mentioned in Huffer and Qalo 2004) is the TuVanuatu Kominiti, which Hilda Lini has been closely involved with and has briefly documented. This community initiative created its own bank and educational institute, both focused on local needs. No doubt many people in positions of influence, be they Pacific Islanders or outsiders, consider such initiatives to be unrealistic or impractical. But they provide people with faith in themselves and their ways, and, more importantly, they create functional groups of people who are productive. Their example should be publicized, better understood, and mirrored.

Faculty from the University of the South Pacific have also conducted useful initiatives with local communities in the management of marine and other resources. In defining how they wish to manage their resources, the communities are also making ethical statements and decisions about development. One possible avenue for pursuing the publicizing of more explicitly political ethical statements is to engage communities in action research about their access to basic rights and services and to political participation. This would help build understanding about how they frame or view political goods and initiate discussions about contemporary political values.

It is also necessary to investigate the sources and the content of ethical standards people put forward.²⁸ What do people in the Pacific rely on or look to when they make ethical judgments? We must be careful to not adopt an idealistic or romantic view of the latter and be as critical of those as we have been about liberal assumptions regarding other societies. As Fleischacker wrote, “Ethical conclusions, while fixed at each moment of action, can always be opened up again. So when we draw on our culture

in deciding how to act, we need some clear idea of who and what is in it and of what it has to say, but we can remain aware that the absolute truth on these questions eludes us every time, and we can be open to including different people or ideas in, or revising our interpretations of, our culture whenever the heat of actions subsides to make room for new reflection” (1994, 145–146).

As things currently stand, it is almost as though the “heat of actions” has never subsided in the Pacific (an ironic thought in a place often portrayed as being slow moving) and little new reflection has been allowed to come to light. And yet it is high time that scholars and communities throughout the region are encouraged to stand back and engage in critical reflection on political values and ethics.

Notes

1 For a general critique of the governance agenda, see, among others, Leftwich 1993 and Williams and Young 1994; on Africa, see Szeftel 1998; and on the Pacific, see Goldsmith 2000; Macdonald 1995; Huffer and Molisa 1999; and Huffer and So’o 2000.

2 In academia, the main proponent of the “Africanisation” claim has been Ben Reilly (2000). At least three regional scholars have disputed this claim; see Fraenkel 2003; Teaiwa 2002; Ratuva 2003.

3 John Rawls is the author of *A Theory of Justice* (1971). As Will Kymlicka stated about Rawls, “His theory dominates the field [of political theory], not in the sense of commanding agreement, for very few people agree with all of it, but in the sense that later theorists have defined themselves in opposition to Rawls” (2002, 55).

4 The University of the South Pacific has tended to view its mission as “training” students to carry out tasks instead of challenging them to think creatively by drawing on different traditions of thought. A course on Pacific thought, philosophy, and ethics is now offered in the USP graduate governance program.

5 There are too many articles on governance and politics to list here. Useful sources are the *Pacific Economic Bulletin* and the discussion paper series, *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia*, from the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. David Lea has also written at least one short article on corruption in Papua New Guinea (1998–99).

6 Lea’s *Introduction to the Ethics of Business and Development in Melanesia* also looks at instances of corruption in Papua New Guinea, but as the title suggests, his essential purpose is to examine the notion of ethics in business (2001). His approach is Eurocentric in the sense that it uses western philosophical thought

and norms to measure or judge Melanesian (in particular Papua New Guinean) behavior in business and development.

7 Numerous reports of corruption or alleged corruption can also be found in newspapers and magazines covering countries of the region.

8 For more details, see Szeftel 1998, and Heidendheimer, Johnston, and LeVine 1989.

9 The moralist position may be making a comeback in the form of the many centers for ethics that are blossoming on campuses (and websites), particularly in the United States, but also in Europe. A study on what has driven the creation of these centers, and their links to transnational corporations and finance, would be useful. One reason for the revival of ethics is suggested in chapter 3 of Jenny Fleming and Ian Hollard's edited volume, *Motivating Ministers to Morality*: "Why do we feel a need to return to the older notions of ethics and virtue? Is it an honest acknowledgement that liberal democracy, with its emphasis on choice as the highest good, in fact needs and presupposes such virtues? Is it the only way religion and faith, relegated to the private sphere, can gain purchase in public deliberation in liberal democracy? Perhaps it is the only proper answer to the decline of parliament thesis" (2001, 31).

10 Williams wrote, "The legal approach . . . depends on the notion that legal frameworks are somehow neutral, objective and non-political. . . . Laws are generally made by the politically powerful who can determine what conduct is declared improper. Equality before the law remains at best an aspiration in many jurisdictions. If legality is a matter for the politically powerful, using only legal criteria to define corruption is to endorse the authority of the strong rather than the just" (1999, 505).

11 This should not be taken to mean that a Samoan (or any other Pacific) politician cannot distinguish what is in the public interest from what serves his or her own particular interest.

12 Williams added: "Public awareness is often low, access to mass media is limited and state censorship is common. The values of rural communities may be incommensurate with those of urban elites or there may be clashes between the opinions of different religious or ethnic groups. Where there is no clear public perception of a set of principles governing the conduct of public office or there is an inability to identify and specify the public interest, the contribution of public opinion to clarifying the public office and public interest definitions is correspondingly reduced" (1999, 506).

13 Since the 1990s, a spate of high-profile corruption cases erupted throughout Europe, North America, Japan, and Korea, among others. Although corruption itself may not have increased, publicity about it has certainly grown, and with it, the public perception that politics is a "dirty game." So whereas prior to the 1990s corruption was treated as essentially a problem of developing countries, it is now evident that developed countries are not immune.

14 Demonstrating that many scholars have succumbed to an economic view of governance problems, Szeftel wrote, “‘Rent-seeking’ has . . . become a euphemism for ‘corruption’ among many political scientists” (1998, 224).

15 See Habermas 1996 and 1997; Mutua 2002.

16 I am indebted to Szeftel in this section. Much of what he has written in his article on Africa coincides with my own thoughts on the governance agenda and its problems in the Pacific.

17 See, notably, Leftwich 1993 and 2000 for arguments disproving the notion that democratization is a necessary precondition for development.

18 A further and more recent school of thought links corruption with criminalization. In the Pacific, Sinclair Dinnen (see in particular 2001) and Maxine Pitts (2002) have written about the links between corruption and crime in Papua New Guinea. This school of thought could be seen as an extension of the legal and public-office views of corruption.

19 Szeftel is even more critical of the governance agenda for opposing the state and civil society: “Firstly the crude antithesis of state and civil society has no basis in reality; democracy rests on a dynamic and effective state as much as on ‘civil society’ (Glaser 1997). Secondly, it is difficult to believe that this watchdog role can be performed by a donor-sponsored ‘civil society’ of civic and human rights associations dependent on foreign funding (Allen 1997)” (Szeftel 1998, 235).

20 The ties between local and international nongovernmental organizations and donors have been discussed by Huffer and Grace Molisa (1999) in the Vanuatu context, and by Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop (2000) and Iati Iati (2000) in the Samoan context. See Mutua 2002 on the nature and policies of international nongovernmental organizations in the human rights arena.

21 This was the case, for instance, with the “rotten boroughs” in the United Kingdom, and the “political machinery” operating in Chicago under Mayor Richard Daley.

22 We can probably assume that people are eager to effect change but are not sure how to go about it. The rising violence and crumbling of institutions in many countries is an indication that change is needed.

23 It may be a stretch to interpret ethics in this way, since the idea of universality is grounded in the approach of moral philosophy, which seeks to say something about all humankind regardless of time or place.

24 Makau Mutua has been very critical of the universalists in the context of human rights: “Many . . . who regard themselves as universalists have labeled many cultural pluralists ‘cultural relativists,’ a form of typecasting or human rights name-calling that has generally had the effect of stigmatizing those who resist the Eurocentric formulation of human rights.” He continued, pointing out somewhat ironically, “Were this [his] book confined to this dichotomous view, it would be fair to label the universalists cultural relativist, as well, because uni-

versalists operate in a specific cultural space and distinct historical tradition” (2002, 43).

25 Fleischacker wrote that “most of us are Westerners whatever else we are, heirs to the peculiarly Western history of the Enlightenment, and some of us—a good many—are heirs to the Enlightenment first and foremost. What this means, in large part, is that we have tried to overcome, or at least weaken, our other cultural allegiances in the light of the Enlightenment critique of tradition and authority. The Enlightenment presented itself as an enemy of cultures, a destroyer of sacred stories and their authoritative interpreters. But it also produced a culture of its own, a distinctive Enlightenment culture, which bears much the same relation to its Christian past as Christianity does to the worlds of Greece and Judea” (1994, 200).

26 One reason for this assumption may be that the police force as a contemporary institution is a western construct. Nonetheless, many police forces throughout the United States are notably corrupt, just as they are in some countries of the Pacific. Perhaps that says something universal about the institution itself.

27 A telling example of this is found in Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2002. It illustrates how a previously successful project, built on the basis of local epistemology, was undermined by the intervention of a retired government official, the former director of “a major financial institution in Honiara,” who came back to his village to implement his “Anglo-European, modernization vision” (2002, 394). The project had been constructed and designed entirely by villagers, youth, and elders, to enhance and build traditional knowledge and to provide activities and occupations chosen by and carried out by the youth in collaboration with selected village elders. The project subsequently failed, and disaffected youth left the village for Honiara, which was exactly what the project had been designed to prevent.

28 Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo have termed this “indigenous critical praxis” (2001).

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