

“Kwaia Tala, clearing the first path”

Ala lā, Tok Stori, Talanoa with Dr Kabini Sanga

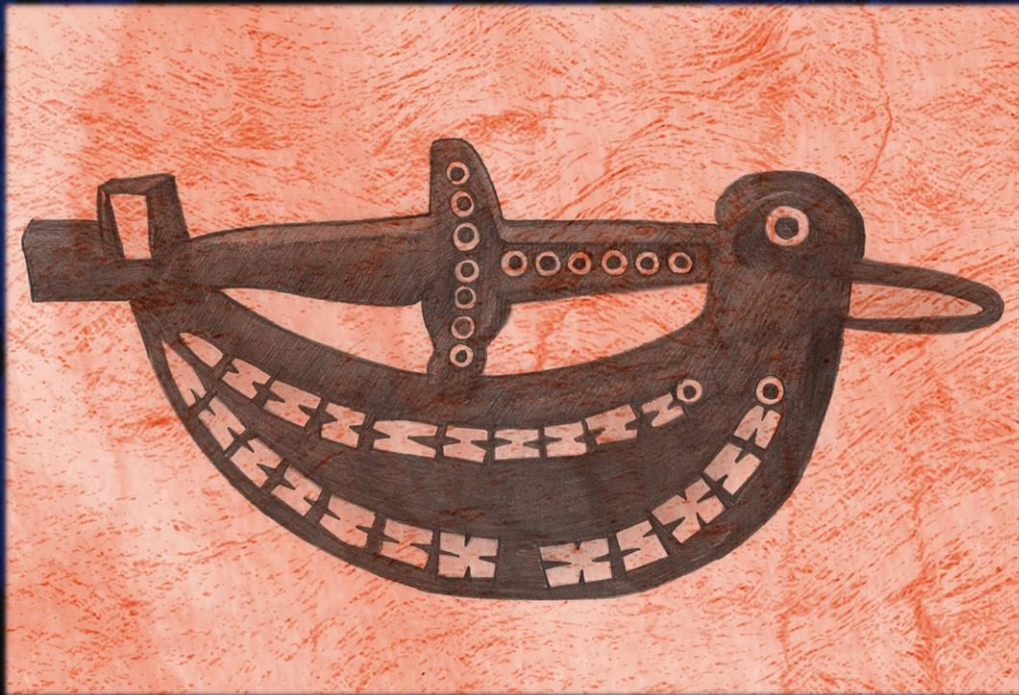


Illustration by Cecelia Faumuina

Author



Dr Kabini Sanga

Kabini Sanga is currently based at Victoria University of Wellington as Associate Professor at the School of Education. Prior to joining Victoria University of Wellington in 2000, he was the former Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education; the premier state tertiary institution in the country. Kabini has also held leadership positions in teacher education (Head of School), Ministry of Education (Chief Education Officer-Director) and secondary schools (as Principal and Deputy Principal) in Solomon Islands. He has been a consultant for Solomon Islands government and international aid agencies over a number of years.

Front image caption & credit



Name: Manu uo

Description: Manu uo, a bird-shaped ornament, possibly of much spiritual significance to a asi (salt-water) tribal group from the island of Mala'ita in the Solomon Islands. It is made of wood with trochus shell inlay. As a manu uo, it is used as a centre piece of a fishnet especially one owned by a fata-abu (priest). It would have been collected in the late nineteenth century and is now looked after by Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Credit: Collection of Auckland Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, 15602.

Link: https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collections-research/collections/record/am_humanhistory-object515352?k=malaita%20fish&ordinal=13

“Kwaia Tala, clearing the first path”¹

Ala lā,² Tok Stori,³ Talanoa⁴ with Dr Kabini Sanga

On 24 February, 2020, Lagi-Maama (Toluma’anave Barbara Makuati-Afitu & Kolokesa Uafā Māhina-Tuai), met up with Dr Kabini Sanga in Wellington. Our tok stori started out at Arabica Café and when that closed we moved to PappaRich, both located on Grey Street. Our enriching tok stori was followed up with conversations via email and relevant published papers provided to Lagi-Maama by Dr Sanga. The papers were:

- 2019: Kabini Sanga, *Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study*, in *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, Volume 15 (3), pp. 243 – 252.
- 2015: Kabini Sanga, *Where are the Cowrie Shells Hidden? Repositories of an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System*, in *Micronesian Educator*, Volume 21, pp. 14-31.
- 2014: Kabini F. Sanga, *A First Look at an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System and its Implications for Research*, in Otunuku, M., Nabobo-Baba, U. & Fua, S. (Eds.) *Of Waves, Winds and Wonderful Things*, Suva: USP Press, pp. 148-160.
- 2012: Kabini Sanga & Keith Walker, *The Malaitan Mind and Teamship: Implications of Indigenous Knowledge for Team Development and Performance*, in *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, Volume 11, Issue 6, pp. 223 – 235.

These publications provided an opportunity for Lagi-Maama to delve into the depth and breadth of Dr Sanga’s scholarship and research into Mala’ita, Solomon Islands. The following is a compilation of relevant extracts from these papers by Dr Sanga which have been interwoven into the tok stori content that took place in February.

Consistently throughout these publications Dr Sanga has always provided the geographical and cultural context of Solomon Islands; the island of Mala’ita and its 12 linguistic groups; and then specifically focusing on Gula’alā where he is from, and the area of focus for his many years of research. Lagi-Maama has drawn on the following reading for information on the geographical and cultural context of the Solomon Islands.

¹ This statement was taken from our ala lā / tok stori / talanoa with Dr Sanga, where he explained that they say in Mala’ita “kwaia tala” which refers to people clearing the first path, where he says that “people who kwaia tala, are not only walking along the path, they’re actually creating the path as they walk on it.”

² Malaitan term for intentional focused discussion as described by Dr Kabini Sanga.

³ Dr Kabini Sanga describes the concept and practice of tok stori as “a form of discursive communication, is an everyday occurrence in the Western Moana Oceania region. To speak of tok stori is to invoke a way of negotiating with the social world. In tok stori, storying is something one does together: a story is constructed by speakers and listeners. Tok stori takes place when people interchange and exchange, creating a collective experience in which the development of relationships is both an accompaniment to, and a purpose of, storying. Group activity which develops knowledge is the stuff of life in Western Moana Oceania societies: this truth is embodied in the everyday nature of tok stori.”

⁴ To have a conversation or to “talk critically yet harmoniously.

Extracts from: Kabini Sanga, *Where are the Cowrie Shells Hidden? Repositories of an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System*, 2015.

*“...Melanesian Solomon Islands, an archipelago of about 1,000 islands east of Papua New Guinea and north-west of Vanuatu. Politically, the Solomon Islands is an independent state, having obtained its constitutional independence from Britain in 1978. Today, the country is a constitutional monarchy, with the Queen of United Kingdom as the Head of State but represented by a Solomon Islands Governor General and an elected Prime Minister as Head of Government. In terms of geography, Solomon Islands has a land area of 28,400 square kilometres or 11,000 square miles. Culturally, eighty or more indigenous languages are found in the Solomon Islands with many islanders speaking a number of languages, together with *pijin* English; the every-day language of communitcaiton in urban areas. The official language is English. The majority of people live in villages.*

The island of Mala’ita has an approximate area of 4,000 square kilometres. The island is one of six main islands in the Solomon Islands archipelago; the others being Choiseul, Isabel, New Georgia, Guadalcanal and Makira. Like the other main islands, Mala’ita is mountainous with a dense tropical forest and numerous rivers and streams. The Mala’ita islanders are Melanesians, with cultures which are patrilineal. There are twelve linguistic groups on the island. From north to south, these language groups are Toabaita, Baelelea, Beagu, Lau, Fataleka, Kwara’ae, Langalanga, Gula’alā, Kwaio, Dorio, Are’Are and Sā. Mala’ita islanders have village settlements along the coastlines, in rivers valleys as well as on mountain ridges. Distinct in Mala’ita are the man-made islands in the Langalanga lagoon (near the township of Auki) and Lau lagoon in north-east Mala’ita. While many Mala’ita people live in other parts of the Solomon Islands, those who live on the island number around 140,000; making Mala’ita the most populated island in the archipelago. Like other Solomon Islanders, Mala’ita people live on their ancestral tribal lands; practising age-old customs of subsistence and communal living, often not under the direct control of the modern Solomon Islands state. The worldview of indigenous Mala’ita Islanders are theocratic; hence their integrated ethical system.”

On the eastern coast of Mala’ita island live the Gula’alā people; speaking the Gula’alā language. Like other Melanesians on Mala’ita island, the Gula’alā people are indigenous to their context and make up the smallest (about 1,800 people) of the twelve linguistic groups on the island. The Gula’alā people are coastal dwellers and share boundaries and overlapping relationships with the Kwaio, Kwara’ae, Fataleka and Lau linguistic groups. The Gula’alā people are made up of seven tribes. In pre-Christian Mala’ita, these tribes were hostile to each other whereas today, the Gula’alā are living peacefully with each other and with the neighbouring linguistic groups. This peaceful co-existence is a direct result of Christianity which was introduced to the Gula’alā in the early 1900s. Like other Mala’ita islanders, the Gula’alā live on their ancestral tribal lands, going about their daily lives according to age-old customs and their acquired Christian value system. Neither Christianity nor modernization have completely influenced the ethical system of the Gula’alā.”⁵

⁵ Kabini Sanga, ‘Where are the Cowrie Shells Hidden? Repositories of an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System’, *Micronesian Educator*, Volume 21, 2015, pp.16-17.

Lagi-Maama:

Our tok stori moved into the topic of the importance of considering different ways of “seeing and knowing” where Dr Sanga shared with us his insights into a Malaitan way of seeing and knowing.

Extracts from: Kabini Sanga & Keith Walker, *The Malaitan Mind and Teamship: Implications of Indigenous Knowledge for Team Development and Performance*, 2012.

- *“Indigenous groups, generally, and, in this case, Malaitan groups, have dynamic, distinctive and particular ways of seeing and knowing that offer pragmatic insights to researchers and those seeking to contribute to these societies and communities.”*
- *“The Malaitan mind is a construct that represents the authentic Mala’ita context-specific embrace of beliefs, norms and modes of behaviours, ways of knowing, doing and creating knowledge (all of which are captured by the concept, falafala [or culture]).”*
- *“As stated, Malaitans perceive reality as socially situated, integrated and wholesome. As creatures, humans are assumed to be a mere part of such a world. The actors and actions of creatures are spatial and exist within time. Both speech and silence are equally important as knowledge-making strategies. To Malaitans, all that constitute the socio-spiritual world are connected in an unbroken chain; hence, this view is cyclical. By contrast, a lineal view of reality separates, isolates, privileges, and highlights the parts and their changing natures.”⁶*

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February 2020.

KS: To the Mala’ita mind, what is music? To the Mala’ita student who goes to music school in New Zealand when they say to that student that this is music and that’s not music; for the student, what is defined or classified as music in a New Zealand music school may not be the understanding of music that the Mala’ita student has. For the Mala’ita student with a Mala’ita mind, they’d likely understand music in ways which might include other genres as laments, arts, dance and movement. In other words, the Mala’ita mind understands things differently from the Western mind.

Again, the Malaitan mind is an integrated philosophical mind; one which understands the social world as held together, not as compartmentalised. Whereas the mind that’s informing policy, that we respond to now, the mind that’s informing scholarship, the mind that’s representative of what we read in the academic literature, doesn’t necessarily, in a fundamental sense, start from the same starting point, in the basic assumptions that we are starting from with a Mala’ita philosophical lens.

⁶ Kabini Sanga & Keith Walker, ‘The Malaitan Mind and Teamship: Implications of Indigenous Knowledge for Team Development and Performance’, *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, Volume 11, Issue 6, 2012, pp. 224 & 232.

Lagi-Maama:

At this point of our tok stori, Dr Sanga refers back to Lagi-Maama's explanation about the 'Arts' of Moana Oceania research project and its focus on addressing the current knowledge gaps, within and across cultural institutions, of different ways of seeing and knowing 'what art is' for each island nation with diaspora communities living in Tāmaki Makaurau (and Aotearoa wide). Dr Sanga starts writing down notes on a piece of paper while explaining the following:

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February 2020.

KS: My view is that when you're looking at the arts, then, what you are doing is exactly the right approach. You begin by clarifying what knowledge platform you're standing on. Hence you can say, here is the conventional understanding of the arts - whether it's related to policy or current practice or funding requirements or whatever - and here are the understandings of the arts which are located, bounded, nuanced and adaptive to particular communities.

It seems that much of the New Zealand (disciplinary) policy literature mirrors the global Western policy literature. Hence, when policy framers point to evidence or best practice, they expect compliance and agreement from all. Often, policy framers forget that their assumed universalities are also located. In other words, the understandings or the wisdom which is supposedly represented in the global literature, and consequently the constructs, their definitions, justifications and applications, are related to particular settings, or to particular peoples or to particular realities. In this sense, there is a challenge relating to inconsistent logic.

So, in your education role, you are probably doing right by approaching your question by first, distinguishing what I call the "formalised or institutionalised settings" which is the policy setting from the "people settings" so that as you seek out a better understanding of people, our Tongan, Samoan, Niuean peoples – then your starting perspectives are much clearer, particularly of people's foundational societal values and worldviews.

Lagi-Maama:

Our tok stori then delves deeper into the two areas that Dr Sanga has written down on the piece of paper: "formalised institutional settings" and "people settings". He talks about the current tendency today to always privilege the former over the latter. And he emphasises the need to reverse this and always start with the "people settings" because that is how you can then affect change within and across the "formalised institutional settings."

Extracts from: Kabini Sanga, *Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study*, 2019.

- *"This ready acceptance of ethics education, however, has not been accompanied by informed conversations involving Solomon Islanders as Indigenous citizens of this*

island nation state...little has been discussed about what is taught in Solomon Islands ethics education.

- *Without a debate about the ethics curriculum, the voices of citizens of Solomon Islands remain unheard. Where local people are not engaged, dialogue is not assured and people cannot participate creatively. Debate ensures that Solomon Islanders have ownership of their ethics education...debate determines how change should occur... Beyond giving voice, debate educates. Particularly, if debate uses Indigenous discursive group processes such as tok stori...discussions are more likely to be relevant, practical and sustainable for Indigenous Solomon Islanders.”⁷*

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February 2020.

KS: Very often, people like us who are doing the kinds of things that our hearts tell us to do, especially to change what’s going on there [formalised institutional settings] so that we can really honour what’s going on here [Indigenous space / people settings]; most times, we start with that [formalised institutional settings] as our unit of focus. It seems that we’re generally trying to change the policies of the institutional domain.

In the education sector, I notice that Pasifika educators who are doing similar work to yours, generally start with schooling as well. They might say, how do we integrate Tongan values, or Samoan values into New Zealand schooling. So, they’re always starting with this [institutional policy, reality and settings] - this is always the first or starting point.

My advice is, you’re starting in the wrong place. You cannot integrate. Fundamentally, as I said, this entire enterprise [formalised institutional settings] is premised on a set of fundamental assumptions that are different from the set of fundamental assumptions that this one [Pacific people in their settings] is starting from. So, logically you are trying to make a leap which is quite a distant one, so you cannot make that logical leap. If however, you want to see something that gives you meaning in your lifetime so that you can say oh, I have made a contribution... in my lifetime, so that your children and your relatives, which include the wider people who will stand on your shoulders, in generations to come, then I am suggesting, start with yourselves first. I am saying, pick your battles. This is why my view is always, start there [people settings]. Start with your people.

Lagi-Maama:

Dr Sanga reiterates strongly the importance of knowing and understanding our “people settings”, which will then bring the power of understanding that can lead to affecting change in “formalised institutional settings”. And the significance of a legacy that we leave in the hearts of people, is one of being a changemaker!

⁷ Kabini Sanga, ‘Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study’, *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, Volume 15 (3), 2019, p.243.

Quote from: Kabini Sanga, *Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study*, 2019.

- “...Solomon Islands Indigenous communities hold a worldview which is integrated. Ethics education within these societies, while ignored in institutional settings, has shown much resilience partly because it is owned by the people and is affirming of them.”⁸

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February, 2020.

KS: Establish and deepen your understanding of that [people settings]. Determine how you then talk about that [people settings] much more clearly. Play the educative role. And ultimately it will be that [people settings], which will then change that [formalised institutional settings]. Whereas, if you're trying to change that [formalised institutional settings], that will take a lifetime. And you won't, you probably won't retire being pleased with your legacy.

As you may have heard me say elsewhere, legacy is not a monument which we leave behind. What we leave behind are often actually infrastructure. We leave behind houses, property and infrastructure. Legacy is actually that which we leave in the hearts of people. So, I'm saying that you want to be able to live in the hearts of the creative generation of Pacific islanders, in the hearts of our artists, our artist educators and straddlers of worlds that come after you; something that will actually be a real legacy. And we are likely to get on that path, if you focus your energy in this sphere [people settings] as opposed to this sphere [formalised, institutional settings]. In a timing sense, that's [formalised, institutional settings] for a later time, the starting point now must be here [people settings].

Lagi-Maama:

The importance of one's approach is key in any type of research and the 'Methodology' approach articulated by Dr Sanga in the preparation of his paper *Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study* was important for us in this context, where we are talking critically about the current Indigenous knowledge gaps within and across mainstream cultural institutions.

We acknowledge that this is the reality for many mainstream cultural institutions, who do not currently have the knowledge of “Indigenous understandings and processes of ethics” to guide their ways of “seeing and knowing” and doing. Dr Sanga offered some insights during our tok stori of why we need to always acknowledge the reality, that this world is complex, and then to navigate it as “straddlers of worlds”.

⁸ Kabini Sanga, 'Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, Volume 15 (3), 2019, p.250.

Extracts from: Kabini Sanga, *Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study*, 2019.

- *“This study is based on qualitative content obtained from a wider multi-year project with the Gula’alā of East Mala’ita, Solomon Islands. In the wider study, guided by Indigenous understandings and processes of ethics, I obtained data from my recordings of daily activities, tok stori with numerous Gula’alā elders and alā lā kini (intentional focused discussions) with key Gula’alā knowledge experts. I had further convened and obtained tribal approval at a rara’aba (literally, calming of tensions) gathering at which the community of clan alafa (tribal leaders) approved the release of the fānanau (combined body of ethical teachings) in this study for wider education purposes.*

For this article, I have limited the data to the study question by drawing out relevant information from four data sources as follows:

- 1) *Fānanau lā (ethics teaching statements, intended to shape character)...*
- 2) *Fānanau lā ‘inatō (concentrated ethics teaching sessions, usually focusing on key principle or virtues)...*
- 3) *Saefua (short story with a moral lesson)...*
- 4) *Sili (a creative genre by expert knowledge holders which is spoken or sung)...*”

The above were supported by alā lā kini with expert knowledge guardians. Moreover, these data sources were mediated by and triangulated with the author’s insider expertise-understanding.”

- *“Recordings of all four oral sources were captured and the derived data were described in the study. The language used was Gula’alā, transcribed by the author, a first-language fluency speaker. Notes of the recordings were translated into English by the author. Gula’alā language is present in-text to show authenticity, difference and complementarity, a way of countering racism and affirming ethnic freedom. In terms of data analysis, the descriptive data were examined according to themes, data source types and topics; all in reference to the research question.”*
- *“As the scope of the study is limited to Gula’alā, its application to other Mala’ita, Solomon Islands and Pacific Islands peoples are restricted. However, the study is relevant and potentially encouraging to Indigenous Solomon Islands and Pacific Islands ethics educators. I write this article as an Indigenous Gula’alā researcher of the Gwailao tribe and acknowledge my personal responsibility for any limitations of description, interpretation or execution of this very new area of Indigenous Pacific Islands scholarship.”⁹*

⁹ Kabini Sanga, ‘Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study’, *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, Volume 15 (3), 2019, p.245.

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February 2020.

KS: But again, what most of our people do is generally we see these two policy spaces [formalised institutional settings and people settings] as either or. In reality they are not. Our people understand this very well. And, so, we assume that the world is compartmentalised. And because of that assumption, that is why we think, this is actually, this one is an either-or-reality. In reality, if you assume that the world is not that [formalised institutional settings] or this [people settings], then it is easier to accept the world as complex and one which allows for journeys, stops and turns.

To come back to our Tongan mat, a mat metaphor actually fits well with a basic assumption of a social world which is complex. And consequently, the two of you - yes you are that [formalised institutional settings / conventional] at a point in time, even a particular agenda or whatever, but yes you are also this [people settings / domains of knowledge]. It is not as if you are just this [people setting] only. You are straddlers of worlds. You build this world, constructing the bridges, this way or that way, they are all overlapping. And then there are other bridges and possibly boundaries that you have to set because the world is complex.

And consequently, the understanding that you bring, if the fundamental assumption is that human existence is not a dichotomy, and that this is not a dichotomous reality you are dealing with here; rather that you are dealing with a complex reality. And consequently, you'd be looking for the strands and patterns. You'd emphasise the strands of people's lives. And sometimes, as I had said elsewhere about a good Tongan weaver, sometimes, in a coloured mat, this particular part of the pandanus goes under the mat and comes out much further down there. But the mat metaphor allows us to negotiate a complex world much better. Whereas, if you assume the world to be only that [conventional /formalised institutional settings] or that [domains of knowledge / people settings], it won't allow you to see what is shared, what is emphasised here and not there, or there and not here, and or all of the variations. You can live with the seeming contradictions of unclear things if you have a basic assumption of a world which is complex.

Lagi-Maama:

Our tok stori moved into Dr Sanga touching on “the domains of knowledge in Melanesia”. The following extract provided further insight into the depth and breadth of such domains of knowledge with an insight into an Indigenous Mala'ita ethical system, which Lagi-Maama thought was important to include in its entirety.



Extracts from: Kabini Sanga, *Where are the Cowrie Shells¹⁰ Hidden? Repositories of an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System*, 2015.

- *“First, the repositories of this indigenous Mala’ita ethical system are completely outside the realm of conventional university ethics. As this study has shown, the cowrie shells [as those valuable aspects of an indigenous ethical system] are hidden in the daily activities of fānanaua, fābasua, saefua and practices of tarafulā and other ways of life of the Gula’alā such as kwaikwaia and sili lā. These repositories are indigenous and integral to the Gula’alā and located within the Gula’alā philosophical mind, worldview, value systems, realities and ways of life. Consequently, the cowrie shells are not necessarily defined as in conventional ethical systems. The meanings of principles will differ and so is the privileging of principles. Because these repositories of ethics are located within Gula’alā, the knowledge systems therein are practically and intellectually inaccessible to the conventional university system. It is not until there are competent Gula’alā speakers within university systems before these repositories are opened to universities.*
- *Second, in the Indigenous Mala’ita ethical system, the repositories are part of an integrated moral philosophy. Unlike the compartmentalized and hierarchical system of ethics of the conventional university, the Gula’alā findings have shown a system which is interwoven around fānanaua, a back-bone repository. As stated, in Gula’alā, fānanaua is the principal repository for ethical exposition, evaluation and education. To use the metaphor of a distribution system, fānanaua is the warehouse where goods are moved in, sorted, labelled and moved out; where product, process and performance reports are received, debated and improvements are made; and where the brains of the system interact, account, reconnect, engage, envision and sustain. Moreover, within this integrated system of ethics, principles and or virtues such as abu lā (holiness), rō lā (obedience) and manatangado lā (trustworthiness) are interconnected and infused throughout the network of repositories.*
- *Third, the repositories of indigenous Mala’ita ethical system are under the moral and legal authority of families and clans. Elsewhere (Sanga, 2014) I had stated that indigenous Gula’alā ethical system is managed under knowledge management protocols, processes and criteria which belong to Gula’alā society. Consequently, it is Gula’alā and families who must deal with issues or questions on accountability, quality, maintenance and sustainability of the Gula’alā ethics repository system. While such autonomy seems clear-cut, this masks the complex conceptualisations and competing interests within and between repositories as families and clans negotiate and make decisions about knowledge, values and agenda.*
- *Fourth, even without relevant empirical studies, it appears that the repositories of Indigenous Mala’ita ethical system are under considerable pressure. First, on one hand*

¹⁰ Dr Kabini Sanga explains that as an approach for this paper he uses the poem *Reef Walking* by Professor Konai Thaman and refers to ‘cowrie shells’ in a metaphorical sense, as meaning the valuable aspects of an Indigenous ethical system.

Mala'ita clans are living within a global knowledge economy which is demanding the freeing-up of knowledge domains, greater collaboration with knowledge communities and engagement with governments, external knowledge stakeholders and global scholars. On the other hand, Mala'ita clans are well aware of the risks of losing control of certain Indigenous knowledge, including secret and sacred knowledge to outsiders. Second, on one hand an indigenous Mala'ita ethical system may be in conflict with other global ethical systems or levels. For instance, the Gula'alā fānanaua (which is the back-bone of Gula'alā ethical system) is a private knowledge domain repository. Only families hold the keys to fānanaua knowledge. In other words, this repository of ethical knowledge is not publicly accessible even within Gula'alā society. These questions may be asked: How can institutional (such as university) regulations, national and or international laws encroach upon indigenous private domain knowledge repositories and still be ethical? What limits maybe justifiably imposed by outside jurisdictions on indigenous private knowledge domains? Why? When? By whom? How? As yet, these questions remain unanswered and beg the attention of indigenous and other Pacific researchers and scholars.”¹¹

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February, 2020.

KS: In fact, I'm having a paper published soon¹² about an instance where I was talking about some of my work about Indigenous people in East Mala'ita, my own people. I was researching into our secret knowledge. To understand that, you have to understand what I call the domains of knowledge in Mala'ita.

While I was still talking, one of the students asked, 'How do you, an outsider who lives in Wellington, go into a tribal context in Solomon Islands and do research on their secret knowledge?' In acknowledging the student's excellent question, I then asked: 'For that question to be valid, what assumptions are you making about the social world of my Indigenous people?' While the student did not answer my counter question, it was clear to me that he was assuming, as if, the world was just made up of two parts – this [conventional/formalised institutional settings] or that [domains of knowledge/people settings]. Whereas, I was assuming a world which was complex. And, as I explained to my student, within a complex world, one can be a principal knowledge guardian of secret tribal knowledge in the Solomon Islands while still actually living in Wellington New Zealand.

¹¹ Kabini Sanga, 'Where are the Cowrie Shells Hidden? Repositories of an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System', *Micronesian Educator*, Volume 21, 2015, pp. 27-28.

¹² Now available: Kabini Sanga & Martyn Reynolds, 'Knowledge guardianship, custodianship and ethics: a Melanesian perspective', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, Volume 16 (2), 2020, pp. 99-107.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1177180120917481>

Extracts from: Kabini Sanga, *Where are the Cowrie Shells Hidden? Repositories of an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System*, 2015.

- “...*fānanaua* (noun for moral teachings). *Fānanaua lā*, refers to acts or practices of daily moral teachings, intended to shape the character of Mala’ita clan members. Using oral communication, parents, grandparents, adults and older clan members will deliberately shape younger ones about principles, behaviours, norms and aspects of their tribal *tagi* (ethical system).”
- “As a knowledge domain, *fānanaua* is a private domain activity hence is not done in public where non-relative tribal members or strangers might hear or witness valuable secrets being conveyed. As a private domain activity, this is a duty for which parents are primarily responsible.

In this indigenous ethical system, fānanaua is the centre-piece of indigenous Mala’ita ethical system. Fānanaua can be described as the sun around which the stars revolve. On one hand, fānanaua informs and is the basis for all repositories of ethics and on the other; all other repositories reflect the radiance or dullness of fānanaua. Because of this symbiotic relationship, without fānanaua, indigenous Mala’ita ethical system is neglected, becomes unclear or is easily lost.”¹³

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February 2020.

KS: As stated, to understand knowledge guardianship, to understand authority over certain kinds of knowledge, and in a Melanesian context, one has to know about the three domains of knowledge. Within these knowledge domains, one has to understand the principles of seniority and how to apply these in Mala’ita. Principles have the appearance of permanence so in other words, they exist externally, which means they are the same today as they are tomorrow. The principle of respect for instance, few will disagree with the importance and or relevance of the principle of respect. We may fight over how it is manifested - that’s practice or the animation of the principle in time or context, we can fight over that, but the principle itself, generally we agree about its value, that’s why it’s a principle; it exists externally.

To restate, understand the knowledge domain; understand the principles of seniority and understand how to apply these adaptively within setting so that in the end, the cohesion of the community is protected and enhanced.

Extracts from: Kabini Sanga & Keith Walker, *The Malaitan Mind and Teamship: Implications of Indigenous Knowledge for Team Development and Performance*, 2012.

“In Malaitan anthropological world, society is integrated and harmony is paramount. Structurally, society emphasizes a communal culture; giving greater weighting to a cohesive

¹³ Kabini Sanga, ‘Where are the Cowrie Shells Hidden? Repositories of an Indigenous Pacific Ethical System’, *Micronesian Educator*, Volume 21, 2015, pp. 20-21.



community (the “we”) than to its (potentially) destabilizing individual parts (the “I”). Such arrangements mean that feelings towards others (affection) are sought out first; these feelings then influence how Malaitans feel (body), which in turn influences what people think (mind); the mind (cognition) is not independent or objective. Nor is the mind as powerful as a determinant of truth.”¹⁴

Lagi-Maama:

The following extract provides a wonderful insight into Dr Sanga’s critique of ethics education in Solomon Islands, where ‘Indigenous ethics education is alive’ but ‘is ignored and not included in the country’s institutional ethics education.’ The same can be said with this ‘Arts’ of Moana Oceania research project, where Indigenous knowledges of our Moana Oceania ‘arts’ exist, and are held within and across our living communities, but is yet to be acknowledged and utilised meaningfully by the cultural sector.

Extracts from: Kabini Sanga, *Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study*, 2019.

- *“This article offers important insights relating to the ethics education in Solomon Islands. First, while Indigenous ethics education is alive, it is ignored and not included in the country’s institutional ethics education. There are, however, Solomon Islanders within schools and in government who are socialized daily through Indigenous ethics education. For them, Indigenous ethics becomes the hidden curriculum of institutional ethics education socialization programmes. This exclusive privileging of schooling and government ethics education is one-legged and can neither hold up nor sustain the moral capacity building and socialization needs of the country.*
Second, at a time when concerns over leadership are related to the character of leaders, Solomon Islands ethics education is not tapping into the understandings of Indigenous ethics education particularly as the latter has much to offer due to its context-embeddedness and its emphasis on and resilience in character education. This neglect by institutional Solomon Islands undervalues the potential contributions of Indigenous ethics education while at the same time undermining the relevance and crippling the effectiveness of institutional ethics education.
Third and finally, Solomon Islands ethics educators and researchers have much to do in negotiating future research on institutional and Indigenous ethics education as well as on the overlapping spaces of both in ways which are respectful of and engaging for all. As a first step, I have proposed key research areas which might feed into a wider tok stori or conversations involving Indigenous Solomon Islanders. Ultimately, tok stori as proposed might show the absurd compartmentalization of ethics education in Solomon Islands

¹⁴ Kabini Sanga, Keith Walker, ‘The Malaitan Mind and Teamship: Implications of Indigenous Knowledge for Team Development and Performance’, *The International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, Volume 11, Issue 6, 2012, p. 225.

wherein institutional ethics education is exclusively privileged at the costs of a more complex, comprehensive, appreciative, participatory and authentic ethics education curriculum and moral socialization which is of, by and for the Solomon Islands.”¹⁵

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February 2020.

KS: In Mala'ita, the tok stori, which in Fiji, Sāmoa and Tonga, is basically talanoa, is vitally important. In Mala'ita, tok stori is the form, the capacity, the essential space, and the necessary mechanism for the mediation, the interrogation, the expansion, the applications of the principles which are deemed important in the culture. Hence, when difficult questions relating to knowledge authority are wrestled with, what a tok stori process finally settles on is usually, secondary. This is why when you are fighting over who has tribal authority over a secret domain knowledge, I would say an explicit statement or placement of authority over this knowledge in tribal, Indigenous settings, is not a fundamental issue. Hence, you may never explicitly say - we have to vote on this, or it is now so and so who has authority - no it's never done like that. Because in the end that's not the main thing. For Indigenous communities, the number one thing is cohesion. It is being a community, being able to live on beyond any one of its members, that is important. In other words, it's the greater goodness of the whole, rather than that of each of the individual members, which is paramount. In the end, tok stori or talanoa is key. Through it, Indigenous communities become stronger, stay united and they can live on. So for me, tok stori or talanoa is very important for Indigenous Pacific knowledge communities.

Lagi-Maama:

The rounding up of our tok stori with Dr Sanga concluded with words of encouragement that he shared with a Mala'ita saying of “kwaia tala”, people who are clearing the first path in reference to the huge task at hand with this project. And it was also reaffirming to hear him talk about the importance of connecting, through the knowledge and practice of tok stori, and capturing these stories ourselves. We have made a start with this ‘Arts’ of Moana Oceania research project.

Tok Stori: Dr Kabini Sanga (KS) with Lagi-Maama, Wellington, 24 February 2020.

KS: In modern nation states, policy is supposedly, evidence-based or a privileging which is evidence-based. What this actually means is never teased out. However, we can say, policy is political. And consequently, for Pasifika policy actors we do not have sufficient ‘evidence’ to use in our conversations with each other and with other actors in this field

¹⁵ Kabini Sanga, ‘Ethics curriculum in Indigenous Pacific: a Solomon Islands study’, *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, Volume 15 (3), 2019, pp.250-251.

of the arts. And because you are, as we say in Mala'ita, you are kwaia tala, you are people who are clearing the first path, in this space.

People who kwaia tala, are not only walking along the path, they're actually creating the path as they are walking as well on it. So, that is what you're doing right now.

At this point in time, there are not enough specific literature on the Pacific Islands understandings of the arts yet. While there are some out there, they're not enough or not in the forms which (institutions / formalised institutions) would want to see them in.

So one of the key strategies that you want to probably use, is you basically capture the evidence yourself, create the stories yourself, capture the stories as you find these. In other words, storying, or talanoa or tok stori, is really the approach, given that the evidence that formalized institutions need is probably not documented yet, or documented sufficiently, or documented in the manner in which this group (formalised institutional settings) understand and they value. One way to do, path cutting, or play a path cutting role, is to capture the story. Storying is actually not only an effective strategy, but it's a form of evidence that's hard to dismiss. That's why you have to capture the stories. So, when you are meeting i-Kiribati, when you're meeting Samoans and Tongans, capture their stories. And that is the evidence. The stories are what you start with, what you go and grow with.

Five years from now, it will be something else as well.

You are foundation-setting people, so build the evidence yourself. And have the conversations and intentionally co-create your journey with others as you go along.