



2 RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL COHESION

Whether we call it clan, kin, family, tribe, or community, there are multiple ways of knowing and identifying ourselves in the Pacific. A few of these ways are captured here. This section explores how social relationships and their hierarchies within the Pacific islands are vital ways of understanding intangible cultural heritage. Social and spiritual rituals, religious ceremonies, and various other cultural practices reflect how Pacific islanders prioritize social cohesion as a pathway to sustainable prosperity, ensuring the transformation of skills, knowledge, and wisdom for survival.

The themes in this section are pivotal to ICH because relationships represent an important organizing principle of life among Pacific islanders and determine how intangible heritage can be safeguarded. Relationships are marked in ceremonial events and rituals such as the communal harvest of *balolo* in Fiji and other ceremonies such as the *bel kol* in PNG. Likewise, the *omengat*, the first-birth ceremony in Palau, brings unrelated clans and families together and is central to family ties and social cohesion. The essays on these and other topics collected in this section illustrate that Pacific islanders take care to mark and honor relationships important to them, as these relationships ensure family, clan, and tribal ties and help to achieve enhanced social cohesion and sustainability.



THE HARVEST OF BALOLO: A FIJIAN DELICACY

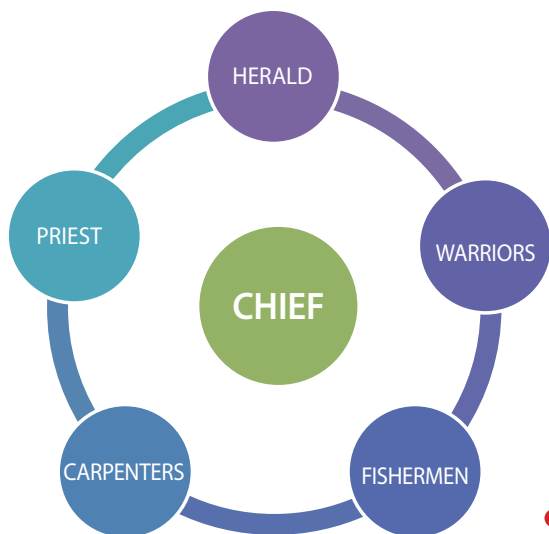
ACA MATAITINI

Balolo ni vakanananu¹
(Wishful thinking)

— Traditional Fijian proverb

INTRODUCTION: TRADITIONAL MARINE HARVESTERS IN FIJI

Indigenous people in Fiji belong to clans that are affiliated with different tribes and groups within societies. Each clan is tasked with a traditional role and function that serve the chief and the society within the jurisdiction of that chief. The following illustration shows the various main clans and their roles.



1. "Wishful thinking," just as someone would wish for balolo when he or she had missed the balolo harvest.

¹ Traditional system diagram. © Aca Mataitini

The gathering of marine resources for consumption and other sea-related activities are such functions that will be referred to in this paper as the functions of the fisherman clan. The act of gathering fish and other marine organisms, if not otherwise stated, will be referred to as “fishing.” Known in Fijian as *gonedau*, the fisherman clan is led by a chief fisherman, called the *tunidau*. Members of the fisherman clan are then usually divided into two sub-clans:

- the fishermen, the *dauniqoli*
- the seafarers, the *daunisoko*

While the *dauniqoli* look after marine resources for consumption, the *daunisoko* look after sea travel, once on traditional canoes but today on any sea vessel. Both clans are known to be fearless and possess a lot of courage. Because of their obligations, the *gonedau* would live close to the chief in villages. By tradition, the *gonedau* clan members are not land owners but are allocated land by the chief’s clan for planting. The *gonedau* are expected to know everything about the sea and marine matters. As such, they are knowledgeable about the fish seasons and weather patterns and changes. For the fishermen, their preparation is always very thorough as they follow traditional protocol and procedure.

The fishermen will go out fishing only if it is sanctioned by the chief. A ceremonial presentation of dried kava roots has to be presented to the chief fisherman for a successful fishing expedition. For important traditional fishing trips, customary protocol related to fishing is usually observed for four nights before the actual expedition. After the expedition, a traditional ceremony is accorded to the fishermen as a token of appreciation. The ceremonial whale’s tooth, called *tabua*, is presented to the fishermen, followed by a kava ritual and a feast. These are prepared by the chief, thanking them for the task completed.

Fishing is carried out in a variety of ways in Fijian islands. Traditional fishermen know the fishing grounds in their respective communities and the best fishing methods that would be applicable. Some fishing techniques are communally owned and inherited while some are

individually inherited. Fishing practices abound, and because they are traditional ways of knowing, proper protocol is observed when information on such knowledge is sought.

FISHING IN VUNA, TAVEUNI

Shark fishing, locally known as *qiri qio*, is carried out on the island of Taveuni in Cakaudrove Province² only when a new chief of Vuna is to be installed.³ There is also the *yavirau*, which is practiced in most parts of Fiji and uses vines and coconut leaves woven into a big circle and placed in the coastal area in between tides to trap fish. Turtle fishing, locally known as *qoli vonu*, is practiced by the people of Nukui in the Rewa Province and by the people of Qoma in Tailevu. Tuna fishing, known as *qoli yatu*, is a heritage knowledge of the people of Vuna in Taveuni, as is ray fishing, known as *sua vai*, to the people of Kaba in Tailevu. The knowledge of the harvesting of sea worms, locally known as *balolo*, will be defined in this article.

Fijians have an awareness that if traditional fishing protocol and procedures are not followed, a lot of disappointment and dangers will be encountered during a fishing expedition. The harvest may be minimal or none at all. This being the case, the clan will make sure that no stones are left unturned as they proceed with their task. The outcome is a result of either a successful or failed traditional process and harvest. A positive result consolidates the chiefs' standings in their own societies, thus ensuring their stronghold, prosperity, and *mana* (effect of power). Failure on a task initiated by a chief and carried out in the name of a chief will likewise diminish his/her reputation.

Balolo in Fiji is harvested annually and only in the months of October and November. There are only certain spots where balolo can be harvested, and while in some years there are good harvests, in others it is not so good. Harvests in October are usually smaller ones while those in November are bigger. The iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture reported in 2012 that balolo was harvested in most of the usual spots in Fiji. Before a harvest, however, important considerations will need to be followed as balolo is considered a gift of the gods. It is a very rare food commodity with an extraordinary

2. There are fourteen provinces in Fiji, Cakaudrove being one of them. Each province can be classed as a chiefdom and has one overall chief who is addressed in a special way. Tui Cakau is the address of the overall chief of Cakaudrove.

3. Ratu Suliano Manawalala, personal communication with author, 2014.

harvesting method. Scientifically, balolo is “a worm (*Eunice viridis*) that burrows in the coral reefs of various Pacific islands and swarms in vast numbers at the surface of the sea for breeding a little before the last quarter of the moon in October and November when they are gathered as highly esteemed food.”⁴ In fact, the “worm’s posterior segments detach themselves and swim to the surface where the reproductive cells are released into the sea.”⁵

As food, balolo is classed as a delicacy in most parts of the Fijian islands. It is, however, an acquired taste. It can be served raw, boiled, fried, or baked in a traditional earthen oven.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: BALOLO HARVESTING IN VUNA

The Kanacea society⁶ now resides in Vuna, Taveuni, although they are the original inhabitants of Kanacea Island, an island of the northern Lau group that used to be included in Cakaudrove Province under the reign of Ratu Golea Lalabalavu, the Tui Cakau of the time. When Tongan King Ma’afu’s men declared war on Tui Cakau in the 1850s,⁷ the people of Kanacea Island were among those that did not support Tui Cakau. This gesture of defiance infuriated Tui Cakau, so he had the people of Kanacea banished and their island sold off. At first, they were taken to Somosomo as slaves to await the cannibal pot of the Tui Cakau. While awaiting their fate, they were subjected to extreme punishment and hardship. Fortunately for them, the Tui Vuna, a close ally of Tui Cakau, asked that he be allowed to take the people of Kanacea to Vuna.

4. Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “palolo.” Accessed 28 September 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palolo>.

5. Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. “palolo worm.” Accessed 28 September 2014. http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/palolo-worm.

6. Used loosely here to refer to the clans and their members who affiliate with the tribal unit called Kanacea.

7. History notes Wainiqolo, one of Tongan King Maafu’s leading warriors, declaring war on Tui Cakau to capture Wairiki, a stronghold of Tui Cakau in Taveuni. Wainiqolo was killed in the event and his army defeated.



2 Taveuni Island (red circle), Kanacea Island (red box).

Tui Cakau complied with Tui Vuna's request, suggesting that they could be his firewood gatherers. Tui Vuna gave them a piece of land where they could live and plant, and they called it Kanacea as well. At first, they were not readily welcomed in Vuna as it seemed to the Vuna locals that their space was being invaded. Nevertheless, inter-marriages took place and new relationships were forged.

The Kanacea tribe comprises three clans—namely, Nabau, Soso, and Lomanikoro. Their chief, Tui Kanacea, belongs to the chiefly Nabau clan. Kanacea Village is separated from the other Vuna village of Nakorovou by a landmark of fruit trees. When a daughter of the chief of the chiefly clan in the Vuna tribe, Yavusaratu, marries a boy from the Lomanikoro clan of Kanacea, it is said that she takes with her as a marriage gift the traditional wisdom of harvesting balolo to the Lomanikoro clan of Kanacea.

In other circumstances, a woman of noble birth would be allocated a piece of land by her clan that she could use for planting.⁸ Instead of giving land, the people of Yavusaratu of Vuna society gave the gift of balolo harvesting, hence the beginning of the Lomanikoro clan of Kanacea as traditional balolo harvesters.

THE PROTOCOL OF BALOLO HARVEST

The process and ritual of balolo harvest in Vuna is unique, reflecting the relationship and connectedness of two clans who are related by kin, the sub-clan⁹ Nakabu of the chiefly Yavusaratu clan of the Vuna society, and the sub-clan Ligaulevu of the Lomanikoro clan in the Kanacea society. Nakabu will be shown or see the sign of the balolo first. This will be in the form of a school of little red fish. The school can only be seen by Nakabu members in the women's sea bathing pool; then it will be seen in the men's bathing pool. As to why this is so, the clan members say that it has always been like this.¹⁰

The Sighting of the Red Fish

When the new moon appears in October or November, a woman will go to the women's bathing pool at about 20:00. If the school of little red fish is sighted, there will be a balolo harvest.¹¹ When sighted,

8. The customary right of use is also accorded to her male children; ownership, however, remains with the original clan.

9. "Sub-clan" is used here to refer to the Fijian *itokatoka*, which is usually an extended family unit within a clan. There may be two or three subclans within a clan.

10. Fieldwork notes, January 2014.

11. Explanation by Seteo Raitau, an elder of Nakabu, during fieldwork.

the Nakabu sub-clan elders will visit the Ligaulevu sub-clan elders with a presentation of kava to formally inform them that the sign of the balolo, the school of red fish, has been sighted. Visiting the pool and observing the school of red fish will continue for seven nights for signs of the rising of the balolo. The preparation for the harvest of balolo begins from this meeting.

Preparation Week

A kava ritual starts off the process whereby members of the Ligaulevu clan will volunteer to be part of the one-week ritual of pre-balolo harvest. During the preparation week, the volunteers, both men and women, will live together in a retreat house. During the week, equipment for harvesting will be collected and made to specifications.

A significant part of the week is also spent on mental and spiritual strengthening following tradition and certain religious practices. Prayer service is held every evening and in the early hours of the morning, followed by a kava ceremony. The week-long retreat is a closed session where all discussions and activities are centered on balolo harvesting. Because it is a one-time harvest per year, preparations are thorough; the balolo may not appear if things are not done properly. Joseva Seitaba of the Ligaulevu sub-clan stated that they have learned from past experiences of how and why things did not turn out right for them.¹² On the same note, Waisiki Masirewa, a seventy-year-old elder of Kanacea, has witnessed the effects of the good and bad preparations.¹³ It is also highlighted that the one-week retreat is not an easy one as there is intense preparation besides the fact that they would have to put aside all their other obligations. Furthermore, they would need to prepare psychologically to be in the water for about five hours in the early morning of harvesting day. They would go in with water at shoulder level, and when they finally finished, water would be at ankle level.

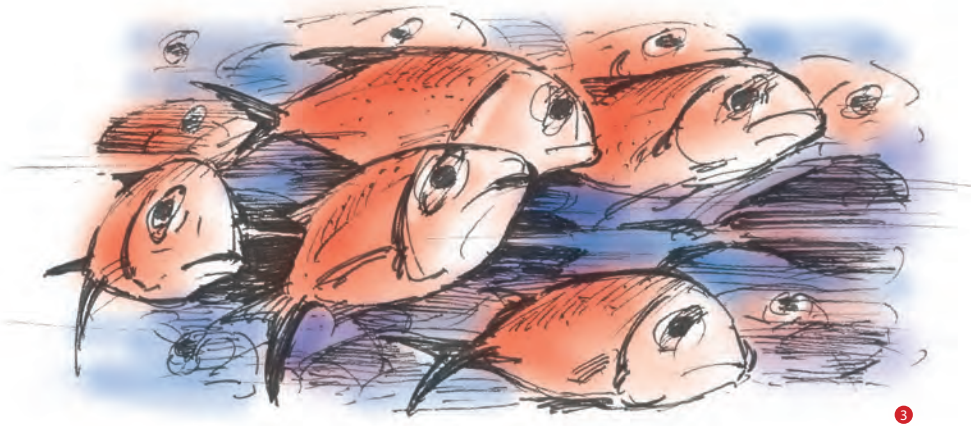
The Second Sign for Harvest

On the seventh day, at about eight in the evening, the elders of Nakabu who are tasked with the role of sighting the red fish will

12. Joseva Seitaba, personal communication with author, 2014.

13. Waisiki Masirewa, personal communication with author, 2014.

make their way to the bathing pool, hopefully for the last time. If the little red fish have turned thin, about half their normal sizes, this is the sign confirming that balolo will appear or rise up in the early hours of the morning. Once the transformation is witnessed, they will make their way to visit sub-clan Ligaulevu members and inform them of the development.



The Sea Snake and Mullet

The actual harvest begins after the visit mentioned above. It begins with a prayer followed by the kava ritual. After that, an announcement is made to the people of Vuna by the village headman that the harvest will be carried out in the morning and that everyone is asked to refrain from going out to watch the harvest.

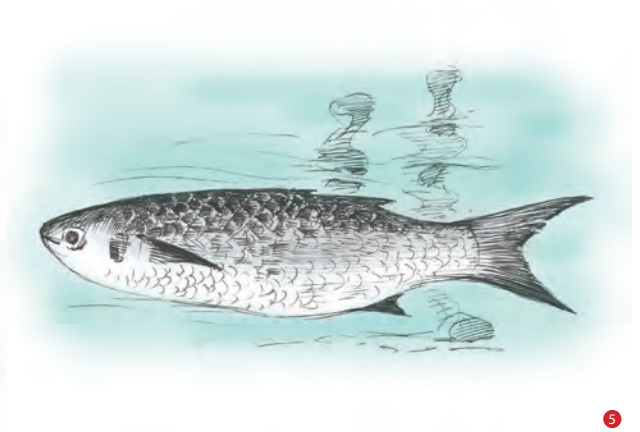
Every step is strictly followed for a productive harvest. In a harvest some years back, the balolo disappeared when the protocol was breached. Seitaba reported that the whole process had been reiterated to them by one of their late elders.¹⁴ The seriousness of it all is like preparing for battle, as the ritual is physically and mentally exhausting. There is silence from when they leave their retreat house to go to the sea, and the account noted that to keep silent in a group for about four hours is a huge task. They communicate using hand or body signals.

When they reach the beach called Tabatabace, three of them will be sent out with their torches to the rock where balolo is to be

14. Seitaba, personal communication, 2014.

3 School of fish.

expected for another sign. Instead of the school of little red fish, two different species of fish are expected. A *dadakulaci*, or sea snake, and a *kanace*, mullet, should be circling the rock. In Fijian, the two fishes are referred to as the *ulu ni balolo*, literally meaning “head of the balolo.” This is a harbinger to a good harvest.



The three men, along with three others for assistance, will try to lead the two fish to the spot where the balolo will appear. This process is quite daunting since it takes about three hours. From the balolo rock to the balolo spot is about twenty-five meters. Their patience and endurance will be tested here. As the two fish approach the balolo spot, the men will slowly be making their exits. When the fish make their way into the area in between the three stones, they will disappear.

The Harvest

The fish disappearing is the last sign the men wait for. They will feel the balolo swirl up from the bottom and then spread themselves out. The harvest begins. The men will need to be fast, before the sun rises. Using their equipment, balolo is transferred to large containers on the shore, with the transferring always done with the men facing the sea.

As they continue the harvest, one of the men will go to the highest spot in the village and call out that the balolo is being harvested, “*Sa suvi na balolo!*” Upon hearing the announcement, the villagers have the approval to go and harvest their own balolo along the village seafront. As soon as the sun rises, the balolo dissolve into the water.

4 *Dadakulaci* (sea snake). 5 *Kanace* (mullet fish).

A Shower of Rain

Rain usually falls at the end of the morning's harvest for about one to five minutes. This signifies the end of the harvest. If there is no rain, the balolo will swirl up again the next morning and be available for harvesting, although this is rare. People are advised to refrain from eating fish for three days after balolo, as it is the time in which fish can be poisonous from eating dead balolo.

Thanksgiving

Once the harvest process is completed, a prayer of thanksgiving is offered, and the men make their way to the retreat house. The rest of the clan members will be waiting for them. After a prayer, a kava ritual is performed before they partake in a hot and hearty breakfast.

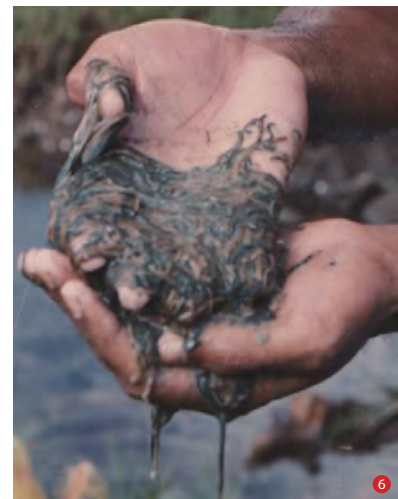
The Distribution

Balolo is then distributed according to traditional hierarchy for who the recipients of a first harvest are. The first distribution is accorded to the chief of the kingmaker¹⁵ clan of Nakorovou Village, Navesi Province. In his role as the provincial ambassador of Cakaudrove, he will deliver the first balolo harvest to the paramount chief of the province, the Tui Cakau. Distribution to the clan chiefs will follow, and then each household will be given their portion.

All recipients are expected to give something back in appreciation of the balolo. The distribution of balolo marks the end of a harvest.

INDIGENOUS WISDOM IN THE HARVEST OF BALOLO

The process of sighting the balolo, along with its harvest and distribution in Vuna, involves the community, where the harvesting sub-clan depends on another sub-clan to first sight the signals. The rest of the clans and sub-clans in the two tribes are then expected to respect their privacy as they retreat to the preparation house for one week. Everyone else then allows the two sub-clans to go about their preparations and responsibilities without disturbance. The end result is that everyone,



15. "Kingmaker" refers to the clan that decides who the high chief will be and traditionally installs him or her.

including their paramount chief, Tui Cakau, gets a share of the delicacy.

Some involved issues are too complicated to explain because they involve natural marine creatures, something human beings would not normally have control over. The types of creatures identified are very familiar to the sub-clans involved both in Vuna and Kanacea. Their observations of the creatures' sizes, textures, movements, appearance, and disappearance illustrate a knowledge passed down through the ages. The recounting of detail in the number and times of day and the preparations undertaken would be knowledge only known to them. Even if another person from outside the clan wished to take part in the sightings and harvesting, it would be a breach of protocol. This is an excellent depiction of traditional heritage wisdom that is owned by the two sub-clans.

The school of little red fish appearing only in the women's bathing pool must somehow have its root in the fact that it is the women from Nakabu sub-clan, of the Yavusaratu clan of Vuna, that are married to the Ligaulevu sub-clan, the Lomanikoro clan of Kanacea. Hence, the school of little red fish will be sighted at the women's pool and by the Vuna sub-clan as the "gift" from Vuna. It will then be the task of the Kanacea clan to harvest the balolo. According to Waisiki Masirewa, an elder of the Yavusa of Kanacea, the sea and women have a very close connection.¹⁶ Likewise, Iosefo Sauto, a member of the Tui Lomani clan of the Yavusa, says that balolo is attracted to women: thus the inhabitation for seven nights in the women's pool.¹⁷

All the activities, from those at the women's pool to the other side of the coast, where the balolo rock is and where the sea snake and the mullet appear, are inexplicable. The village elders also could not explain the reason a mullet would be found together with a sea snake or vice versa. That they would disappear when they entered the harvest spot after taking their time is equally cryptic, as when they do, the balolo appears in a flash, swirling and spreading its outreach.

16. Masirewa, personal communication, 2014.

17. Iosefo Sauto, personal communication with author, 2014.

One cannot help but notice a straight line stretching from the harvest spot to the balolo rock and an underground reef called Navesi. From the underground reef, there is a forty-five degree angle

to the women's bathing pool. This, along with the new moon in October or November counting as the first night, harvesting in the early hours of the morning before sunrise, and a short shower of rain following the harvest, are astonishing coincidences.

CONCLUSION

The heritage wisdom described above on how the people of Vuna and Kanacea relate to natural resources is evident in the harvest of balolo and has no doubt been learned over time. Masirewa reiterated that it is imperative that the protocols of the given gift are respected and followed. The Chief of Kanacea, Ratu Solomone Regu, said that his society is fortunate to be bestowed this unique gift from the gods.¹⁸ At 83, he has witnessed the passion with which the Ligaulevu elders have carried out this special task. He advises the current clan members to continue and uphold the tradition.

It is noted that Ligaulevu and Nakabu are not fisherman clans, but are chiefly clans. The fisherman clans in the two societies do not take part in balolo harvesting, although they do practice their own fisherman responsibilities and functions in their respective societies, as in the practice of *qiri qio* (shark calling) and *qoli yatu* (tuna fishing), which also have traditional protocol. Balolo harvesting in Taveuni is a gift between chiefly clans, and it has remained so until today. Joseva Seitaba of Ligaulevu vows that they will keep the tradition alive by involving their young people in the harvest, making them aware of its importance and historical background.¹⁹

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18. Ratu Solomone Regu, personal communication with author, 2014.

19. Seitaba, personal interview, 2014.

Solomone Regu, Chief of Kanacea, who acknowledges the balolo harvest is a blessing for his tribe that must be sustained; Samuela Tui, an elder of the traditional fishing clan who gave a brief account of the qiri qio and the qoli yatu, two other traditional wisdom subjects in Vuna; Iowani Tavata, village headman and tribal spokesman who allowed the author access to the people; Samuela Tui and family, host for the one-week research; and the Vusaratu, Navesi, and Lomanikoro clans for their generosity and support.