

## ***THE YARA/ROQOTABAKAU AND IVONOVONO: A METHOD OF READING A TEXT*** (Matt. 5:17).

Tomasi Tarabe

### **Abstract**

Walking into a text fully clothed in Oceanic tradition and culture allows for new reading and insights and challenges the 'nakedness' which one is supposed to have when reading into a text-from "inside coming outside." The intention of this paper is to rethink biblical interpretations. I will discuss the use of culture to read into the text focussing on the two rituals yaratabakau and ivonovono as entry points to interpreting a text and interact with biblical authors, original listeners and readers' cultural selves. The rituals of the yaratabakau and ivonovono are two important rituals for the people of Lau in Fiji because they symbolically speaks of the unity of a group of people in a vanua (community). Aspects of the power of sin, suffering, death, atonement, and new life are portrayed in these rituals which allude to the belief that God was already in Oceania long before the missionaries arrived. Using this approach to interpret a text also underscores the importance of tradition and cultural knowledge much of which had been demonised and rejected by early missionaries and continues to be done by many charismatic Christians in contemporary times. This rethinking of interpretation shall focus on these two concepts: the "wrapping" of the *yara* and the "unwrapping of *tabakau* and *ivono*. I argue that this method of reading the Bible is the new direction to rethink interpretations, thereby introducing 'prejudice' or 'presupposition' into the text our meanings.

*Tabakau  
Tapuni*

### **Introduction**

Let me begin this paper with the story of the origin of the yaratabakau and ivonovono. A long time ago lived a man called Niumataiwalu. He was the chief of Lakeba in Lau and bore the title of Tui Nayau. Niumataiwalu symbolises the Fijian culture before the missionaries came. He was handsome and had status but he also had a flaw. Like Niumataiwalu the Viti culture was good and continues to be good; it was the most important thing to the Viti people because it contained the spirituality that guided their lives and gave their lives meaning and purpose. It also had its flaw in the belief system that guided a culture of warfare and cannibalism. In Fiji's history, Lakeba is important because this was where the two Wesleyan missionaries first landed. If Niumataiwalu is the culture then the two men Saunikalou and Radua symbolise the missionaries

On one of his visits to the chiefly island of Bau, he fell in love with the Radini Levuka who was the wife of the chief of that island, both had no child in marriage. The relationship between the chief's wife and Niumataiwalu endured and blossomed and resulted in the birth of a son called Banuve. Much later, Banuve was installed as the chief of Bau with the title Vunivalu (warlord).<sup>1</sup> The offense committed by Niumataiwalu against the chief of Bau was not easily forgotten by the chief. The Vunivalu then presented two men from Ono i Lau residing at Bau at that time with a *tabua*<sup>2</sup> made out of stone requesting them to kill Niumataiwalu. The two men were Saunikalou and Radua. The story goes on that through a deception the two men were able to kill Niumataiwalu in Ono during a yaqona ceremony. The deception involved Saunikalou sending his daughter with a war club to the house where

<sup>1</sup> V. Savu, *Nayau: Noqu Yavutu: Kawa Vaka Tuivanuakuila 11 nai Taukei kei Nayau mai Bau* (Fiji, Suva: Savu Internationals, 1994), 121.

<sup>2</sup> Tabua is men's item of wealth-it is polished whale's tooth.

the yaqona ceremony was taking place. The club was concealed or wrapped in banana leaves and she dragged the club this way into the house. Once the girl was in the house, Saunikalou sprang from the midst of the people inside the house, unwrapped the club and struck a blow at Niumataiwalu. Niumataiwalu ran out of the house to save himself. Two Samoan men who were fishing in the sea nearby ran towards the beach throwing their nets at Saunikalou in an attempt to stall him and save Niumataiwalu but they did not succeed. Later, Saunikalou killed Niumataiwalu and revenge was finally achieved for the chief of Bau. The *veiwekani* or cultural relationship between the chiefs of Bau and Lau, became widened in that act of adultery committed by Niumataiwalu thus necessitating a ritual process where reconciliation had to take place through the *roqotabakau* and *ivono*. The *yara/roqo tabakau* and *ivono*, are rituals that symbolise a true story.<sup>3</sup>

***The Concept of "Wrapping" the club: A form of Empire Rules***(Matt. 5:17a).

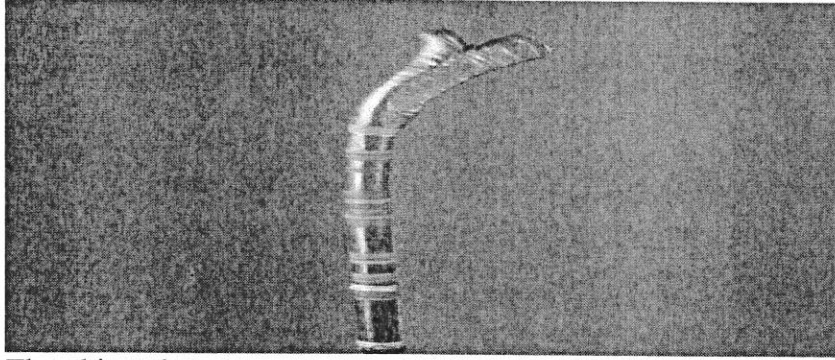
The story has significant concepts that symbolise the empirical ideas that surround colonisation and the transmission of the gospel in Oceania. While the *yaratabakau* has significant connections to the death of Niumtaiwalu, the banana leaves that wrapped the club is no longer used in the ritual now. Banana leaves were used in yaqona drinking ceremonies in the olden days. Nowadays, coconut shells are used for this purpose and this could contribute to the absence of banana leaves being used in the ritual, instead the *tabakau*, a mat made from the coconut leaves, is used. People who saw the girl dragging the banana leaves probably thought she was bringing them to be used as a cup in the yaqona ceremony but it gave the perfect cover for the killing that was about to take place. For the purpose of this paper, it is the concept around the wrapping of the club that is the focus for it emphasises the way colonisation wrapped the interpretation of the Word of God with ideas foreign to the people of Oceania.

The word "yara" refers to something being dragged behind by someone, and in this ritual, it refers to a girl dragging a club wrapped in vudi (plantain) leaves. "Tabakau," is a mat woven from coconut leaves and has inferior value to a mat made from the leaves of the pandanus tree. The word *tabakau* is made up of the words *taba* and *kau*. "Taba" has several meanings but in this paper it means to press down something giving it density. "Kau" means a piece of wood. When a piece of *kau* (wood) is *taba* (pressed down) on something alive the density of the 'blow' can cause destruction so *tabakau* means to press down a piece of wood that can cause destruction. In this sense, *tabakau* is a metaphorical expression for a

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<sup>3</sup> The word Fijian is an English translation, but I would prefer to remain in my own dialect in using Viti in this discussion. In the Fijian dictionary by A. Capell, *The Fijian Dictionary*, (Suva: Fiji: Government Printer, 1991), 264-2645. The word Viti is divided into 3 parts; in part 1, Viti means, to break off small branches, gather the spoils of a battle; part 2, it means to wander through the bush, or be lost at sea; and in part 3, Viti is the general name in the west and in the Tongan pronunciation, Fiji, is used. It is very clear to me now that the use of Viti in this paper is related to my new method of interpretation because, in the way the *island readers* are lost and in this process it is the intention of the writer to rethink and try to reconstruct the broken pieces of culture and make meanings in the way islanders looked into the text.

piece of wood which in this case is a club.



The object that was wrapped around the “*vudi*” leaves was a club, and this object was used for killing human-beings in ancient times. So, the notion of *yara* is tremendous as we relate the idea in terms of interpreting a particular *text*. The wrapping in this ritual can be viewed as a form of colonization of marrying foreign theories or philosophies using foreign club to interpret the text. Such methodology of interpretation by foreign personals (*papalagi*) built in island readers the fear of doing wrong in the eyes of imperial “rules.” This is proven when the reading of Matthew 5:17 through cultural lens: “*Dou kakua ni nanuma ni ’u sa lako mai me ’u tabaka sobu na Lawa kei na nodra ivakavuvuli na parofita, au sega ni lako mai me ’u tabaka bokoca, ia me ’u vakataucokotaka sara*”[do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them(Matt.5:17)]. The phrase, “*dou kakua ni nauma ni ’u sa lako mai me ’u tabaka sobu...*”/ do not think that I have come to abolish...(vs.17a). In this new reading shows the tremendous impact of the imperial “rules” that the thinking capacity of island readers was choked to death. The word “*taba*” is a verb, and ever since the colonial system existed the thinking ability of island readers have been pressed-down in the graveyard. The word *tabaka sobu* (pressed down) is an adjective, and the impact and force of the *iwau* or club was very deadly to the island readers.

However, the reading “*inside coming to the outside*” was the missionaries “quick” interpretation of the text in order for them to ridicule the gods out of existence and then grafted on to it a ‘purer’ and more spiritual faith that was not part of the native people ways of life.<sup>4</sup> Henderson argues that, “...the religions of the Fijians was much brighter and far more ennobling than the missionaries believed or were ever willing to admit; true religion are not expressed not so much in convectional beliefs, or theological creeds, as in the attitude of the mind. Rather, the people who could bow their heads reverently and submissively in the presence of a superior spiritual power had the root of the matter is in them.” In other words, the influence of colonialism and missionary works had “wrapped” Christianity from “*inside coming to the outside*” and this was how they had interpreted Matthew 5:17.

The “island reader” now is conscious of the way Christianity was introduced wrapped by the imperial “rules” of interpretation. The *vudi* which wrapped the *iwau* needs to re-address the following issues: the interrelation of colonialism and the missions movement, the arrival of the indentured system, the legacy left behind by the *Sulu ni Lotu*, the *Tu-galala* (Independence) movement, the three coup culture, and the new, Fiji Constitution. An important insights that can be detected was the model of *Sulu ni Lotu* (church cloth) left behind by the co-workers of colonialism and missions. The ‘church cloth’ was the metaphor for knife, spears, *tabua*, and the Bible that was passed from one *vanua* to the next as

<sup>4</sup> G. C. Henderson, *Fiji and the Fijians 1835-1856*, (Australia: Angus & Robertson Limited, 1931), 77.

Christianity spread.<sup>5</sup> Akanisi Tarabe argued that the history of the Pacific has been marked by social and political changes and transformation,<sup>6</sup> and noted two important issues that spoke of this transformation: the language of cloth and the connection between clothing and identity. These insights also speak of the masking of identity through cloth. In this case thevudi leaves were type of cloth that masked the true intention of the action witnessed. Can we still link our identity to the traditional cloth when our social identity is in question? Does the language of cloth express or mask identity? If identity is the most essential and personal characteristic across various social groups (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, religion), what would be the appropriate interpretation of the apparel in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious society like Viti today?

Therefore, the kind of apparel to reading a text from “*inside coming to the outside*” is in fact symbolising a type of authority, power, and leadership that derives from the “rule” of empire. The challenge lies in the impact and influence these symbols have on the Viti community. As a result, the gap left behind by the “rules” of the empire has enabled the Church to be the mediator of the same kind of “rules” in their interpretation of a text. The yara tabakau reading of Matthew 5:17, has been dragging and continues to suppress the island readers to find the true meanings of Jesus’ words in life situation. The missionaries however, ignored the Oceanic culture and did not think it important enough to retain the quality of spirituality of the native people.<sup>7</sup> Instead of that, the reading “*inside coming to the outside*” of Matthew 5:17; had in fact taken the opposite direction for not fulfilling the message in the Sermon on the Mount, but rather; they were seen to be the abolisher of the ritual and cultural tradition that were most precious to the people in Viti or Oceania. Now, the ideology that faith wrapped in colonial ideas has marked the Church as *author* to interpret *text* in the “rules” of empire.

### ***The method: “Sagasagawale” voices for island hermeneutics***

Sagasagawale is the voice of lali beaten whereby the people of Ono were called for special purpose for war or in communal gatherings. In this story, the beautiful voice of sagasagawale had lost its voice due to their disobeying the lord of the vanua. From there on the lali bears



the meaning “all-our-work-for- nothing.”

This paper argues that a “new”- “reading of the bible” for island interpretation is for the island mind to be ‘creatively active’ in the interpretive process. The word sagasagawale is made out of: (i) “saga” means to try hard to do or get something; to strive, pursue, persecute, endeavour, be in earnest; and (ii) to be “sagasaga” really means to put all effort to achieve

<sup>5</sup> Thornley Andrew, *Exodus of the iTaukei: Wesleyan Christianity in Fiji 1848-74* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 2002), 475. Notes taken from Rev Ilimeleki Susu’s presentation on the topic “faith and Clothing Tradition at DTC” 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Akanisi Tarabe, “White Clothing and the Fabrication of Identity,” *Na UliDTC Journal*, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Henderson, 77.



something, and (iii) the word “wale” (an adjectives); it brings to conclusion that all effort for *island readers* to try and make meanings of a text is of no worth “a ka wale” (something worthless).

It is therefore, suggested that for island readers to participate in the realm of Biblical interpretation of text than they should “sagasaga” at all the times, be very creative, and imaginative in order to bring to mind things that are present in our senses or culture and develop them into original ideas without being too dependence to the western philosophical ways of thinking. The result of creative imagination is innovation where the thinking process is put into practice.<sup>8</sup> For this to happen in biblical studies, hermeneutical of yara/roqo tabakau and ivonovono is an imperative where island readers are encouraged to go beyond notions of totality in biblical and hermeneutics, letting the new currents of the voice of sagasagawale to be heard and draws oneself to participate in performing the new hermeneutics in the islands. The new voice of sagasagawale is publically announcing that “reading into the text” is not at all evil, rather it is a way of becoming for island hermeneutics that will challenge and to deconstruct the imperial rules of interpretation being rooted in Oceania for long-long time.

### ***The Lens to the New Island Reading (Matt. 5: 17).***

Now, to begin from the “new” island context, the sections are divided into three concepts: the roqo and unwrapping of tabakau, and ivonovono. This “reading into the text” that usually termed “*eisegesis*” or to introduce “prejudices” or presuppositions into the text is a deliberate transgression of the “rule.”<sup>9</sup> David Graeber argues that, this is just one rule among many others that rule the structuring of our lives daily, that our ways of thinking has been structured by a ‘utopia of rules’ that when we don’t conform to certain rules, we become idiots amongst other people.<sup>10</sup> I for one have always been in the position to pressure my student that prejudices or presuppositions are not allowed in our reading process because they are tainted with false judgments that can harm the meaning of the text. “Prejudice,” in German legal terms, refers to a provisional verdict before the final is reached and read out.<sup>11</sup>

### ***The concept of roqotabakau: a new indigenous blow the veiwekani reading (Matt.***



***5:17b).*** Matthew 5:17b: “...*ia me ’u vakataucokotaka sara...*” [“...*but to fulfil them*]. The word “*ia*” or “*but*” is a conjunction and it depicts in the reading as to someone required to perform or to carry out a duty or a function i.e., good or bad: for example, *sa ia nai valavala vinaka se sa ia nai valavala ca*. The next word is “*me ’u*” or “*I*”, expressing a purpose, in an imperative clauses: *me ’u, “vakataucokotaka sara.”*<sup>12</sup>In

<sup>8</sup> Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds. Learning to be Creative* (West Sussex: Capstone, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Vaai, 28.

<sup>10</sup> David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (London: Melville House, 2015), 45ff.

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed (New York: Continuum, 1994), 270.

<sup>12</sup> Capell, 145.

the Matthean context, God in the first place had given moral and ceremonial laws to help people to love God with all their hearts. Throughout Israel's history, however, these laws had often been misquoted and misapplied. By Jesus' time, religious leaders had turned the laws into a confusing mass of rules. So, the imperative clause *me'u* or *I*, shows how the colonizers had used the "rules" of power in fulfilling the demand of colonialism.

Roqotabakau then is a paradox. It speaks of carrying in one's arm something of precious value when in fact the tabakau is a mat of insignificance. But since the tabakau is a metaphor in this paper for a club, the club is carried as a worthless weapon. So, the roqo (carrying) of the tabakau is an act of decision and the reading out of peace rather than war, humility rather than pride. It also depicts the action of love and appreciation of something valuable. In the tripartite relationship of *author*, *text*, and *island readers*, these actions of roqotabakau are symbolic in themselves and refers to the process of interpreting the text: it must be witnessed, validated and affirmed of its cultural meaning and authenticity. Thus, the overall purpose of this action is to eliminate any prejudice or presupposition in the reading and interpreting process.

Therefore, the solidity and durability referred to yara tabakau of colonial rules is used here to reconstructing the damage done by the "rules" in reading of a text. The durability of kau (wood), now gives it a "new blow" -- an indigenous blow in order to transform the interpretation (Matt. 5:17b). The "kau" challenge the colonial interpretations to destroy the colonial wraps. The meaning of the new law or interpretation is found in the *author*, and *historical context*: that the people in Viti consists as "one" entity, identified by a common dialect or group of confederacy or "vanua" or "*veiwekani*" (relational connectedness).<sup>13</sup> In other words, when *island readers* read or interpret the bible, the *veiwekani* is also present, participating in the process, because they are communion-centre readers and therefore; they read in community. Vaai said, if an island reader wants to find his/her 'elements' (hermeneutical obsession or theological),<sup>14</sup> and biblical passion; it should not be a mere individual process apart from the community (*veiwekani*) as Robinson seems suggest, but rather a process rooted in the life of the cosmic-community.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, for an islander, understanding occurs within a larger historical context when they all participate in the process of roqotabakau.

### ***The concept of unwrapping tabakau: the doers of vakataucokotaka*** (Matt. 5: 17c)

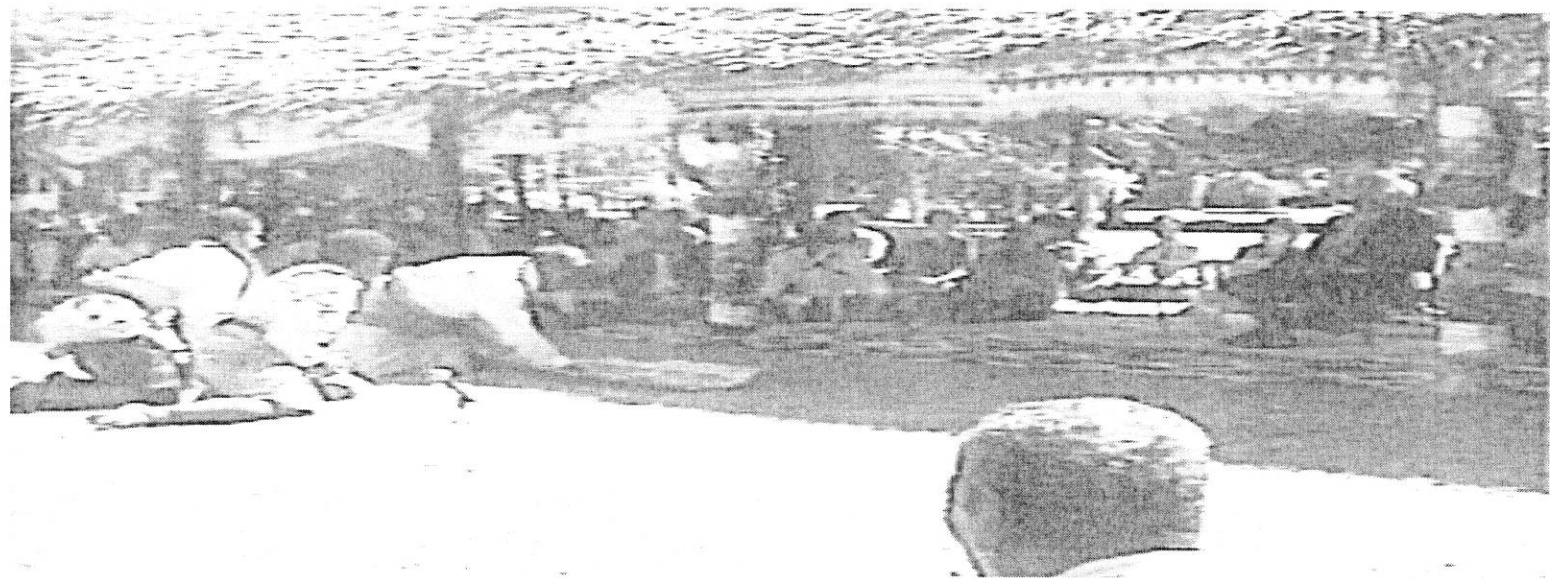
A shift of performing the ritual took place, from "au" or "I," the *reading into the text* begins by the "unwrapping" the hidden colonial context, the "rule" of imperial laws that always turned the true meaning of laws for their personal agenda. Just like, the religious leaders time in Matthew 5: 17. Because of the impurity of the "*inside coming outside*" reading of the text, is finally disclosed the flaw of interpretation by the rules of empire. Now the notion of an imperative to re-reading and interpreting the text lays in the hands of Oceanic to be faithful and doers of the text. Since, the flaw of interpretation are now revealed and the verdict to read into the text is pertinent, because; the "island readers" are no longer be called an "idiot," but rather; the colonial interpretation of history is labelled as unproductive and silenced.

<sup>13</sup> Tarabe, "Balawaviri'i: an indigenous approach to health and well-being" (University of Auckland, 2015): "*Veiwekani*" is identified by people's dialect, the people of Kubuna, Burebasaga, Caumatalevu, Cakaunitabua, Cakaudrove, and Lau. And within each *veiwekani* different groupings of peoples can be identified by, their *yavusa* or clan, *mataqali* or sub-clan, *tokatoka* or sub-lineage or extended family. It alludes to the fact deep within the Viti is the whole *veiwekani*.

<sup>14</sup> Vaai, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Ken Robinson, *Finding Your Element* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 7ff.

Can you use this  
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the  
if the  
Can you  
Tewi's perspective  
as a  
press down



Matthew 5:17c: "...ia me 'u vakataucokotaka..."["...but to fulfil..."]. The Bible is perhaps the most influential literature in shaping our island life in social, political, economic, and religious aspects. Although the interpretation of the bible is crucial in transforming the islander's understanding of the world. This presentation argues that for many years islanders educated in the West have become agencies of empire in their thinking and approach. When I was a theological student, we were taught by islander lecturers and who were trained in the West, or supervised by a Western thinker, that the golden rule is to start from the "*inside coming outside*" from the world of the *author*, and *text* to the world of the present receiver. This kind of training is in fact the fulfilling of the law to read and interpret the bible within "rules and principles of the empire."<sup>16</sup>

The word *vakataucokotaka*, means complete. It has a prefix 'vaka' and suffix 'taka'. *Vaka*<sup>17</sup> in this context, is an adverb and when it is added to *taucoko*(whole, complete, entirely);<sup>18</sup> the new word is *vakataucoko*. The word "taka" (suffix), has many meanings but in this paper I prefer to use an island proverb to show its meaning: *a tabua e taka e muri, a buli leka na kamunaga e levu* (a small cowry is of more value than a whale's tooth).<sup>19</sup> In retrospective analysis of the word *vakataucokotaka* with the English translation "fulfil" (Christian Growth Study Bible) and "accomplish" (Life Application Study Bible), are important to this study. In Greek, the word fulfil (πληρῶσαι [aor.act.inf]); meaning to fill, make full, fill up (Matt.13:48), fill up a deficiency (Phil.4:18-19);<sup>20</sup> and accomplish (τελειοῶ), meaning to perfect a person, advance a person to a completeness.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Upolu Luma Vaai, "Motu mala Taula: Towards as Island 'let' Hermeneutics," *The Pacific Journal of Theology*, 53 (2015). He said that, 'empire' in this sense refers to "any," person, institution, government, organization,, or nation, that see their policies, rules, models, theologies, interpretation as the 'only' universal truth, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Capell, 251.

<sup>18</sup> Capell, 223.

<sup>19</sup> Capell, 213.

<sup>20</sup> Wesley J. Pershbacher, *The new Analytical Greek lexicon*, (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 332.

<sup>21</sup> Persbacher, 404.

five examples, do  
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The “*reading into the text*,” points to the insufficiencies of the “*inside coming to the outside*” interpreting Matthew 5: 17b, which shows that a deficiency of a work already done needs fulfilled. In other words, the intrinsic wisdom and value of interpreting the text by Oceania is not met or fulfilled due to the impact of tabakau. As a result to that, the flow of God’s blessing was not well received or experienced by the Oceania since the impact of tabakau had siphoned the blessing away from their own land. In that way, the notion of cultural significance of Oceania are empty and filled with shame and the people of Viti or Oceania remain subordinated to the rules of the empire. It is the intention of the paper to deconstruct the impact of tabakau and explore ways in order to reconstructing the Oceania people to a higher standard of “*reading into the text*” aiming, to vakataucokotaka sara (perfect & completeness), the blessings of God in their life situations.

***The Concept of ivonovono: Vakataucokotaka sara***(Matt. 5:17d)

The ritual that is performed immediately after the roqotabakau is the “ivonovono.” The word ivono begins with the noun performative “i” very commonly added to verbal roots, sometimes with reduplications which indicates the scene of an action.<sup>22</sup> In the action: “ivonovono ” a man carries a bunch of two coconuts on his shoulder. He performs the ivono by kneeling on the ground with the bunch of coconuts and moves in this fashion towards the chief who is seated on the special honoured mat called tabukaisi (mat for the chiefs to sit on and not the commoners). The man places the bunch of coconuts in front of the chief and is received by the matanivanua who kneels and presses his hands on the bunch of coconuts and shouts out “ivo---no---vakaturaga!.” This announcement of the ivono is an affirmation that the roqotabakau is indeed true- there is no deception or treachery in its presentation – in other words the intention of the people who are presenting it as a sign of peace and unity is truly true. The word vakataucokotaka is prefix by the word “sara” (adverbs and adjectives), to mean greatly or expresses the “greatness” of “*reading into the text*.” Or the “*reading into the text*” in view of the proverbial sayings it is more valuable than the grafting of a purer and



more spiritual faith wrapped in avudi leaves.

<sup>22</sup> Capell, p72.



The coconut time for new interpretation has arrived in the Oceania to make changes in the way the Church have been reading the bible. In his coconut theology, Sione 'Amanaki Havea said, "no one can push back the time when it will ripen, nor make it ripen any earlier: only at the fullness of time will it fall."<sup>23</sup> The sagasagawale voice is no longer worthless, but it begins to bear fruits from their "sagasaga" to strive in earnest hard working from OBSA to achieve a milestone in producing a local biblical hermeneutics; the voice argues that, the island interpretation has been *yara* the island wisdom in a deep and unmovable deep imperial ocean; however, the voice is also challenging the rules of the empire to repentance from the sins of misquoting the text (Matt. 5:17a). More so, the voices of being ridiculed to "all-our-work-for- nothing" in the concept of tripartite in weaving in and on the tabukaisi, now; breaks all the notions of territorialisation, rules, in the island interpretative process.

### *The concept of tabukaisi as women's role in the vakataucokotaka*

I would like to be very brief in highlighting the roles of women in this ritual. Although, the voices of women are not heard, but it does not meant that they are not important. But basing from the concept of "vakaturaga" it depicts the ideal behavior among indigenous Fijians...it refers primarily to actions and personal characteristics which befit the presence of a person of high status, such as a chief or his representatives and counterparts.<sup>24</sup> In her analysis of this concept, Tarabe argues that the concept of vakaturaga is an inbuilt structure in the itaukei social system that projects an image of itaukei tradition being immutable in spite of the historical processes it has passed through. This concept she adds that the vakaturaga itself means 'of men' or belonging to men or 'of chief' or belonging to a chief, and in this sense; vakaturaga places women 'outside.'<sup>25</sup>

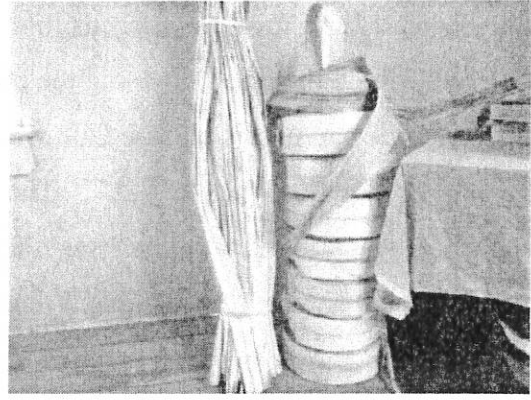
Tarabe claimed that the traditional roles that itaukei women play in itaukei rituals have never been properly analyzed before, but, in her study, women and their traditional wealth of mats and bark cloth form an integral part of ceremonies and rituals.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Sione 'Amanaki Havea, *Christianity in the Pacific Context, 'South pacific Theology: Papers from Consultation on Pacific Theology'* (Australia: World Vision International South pacific Regnum Books, 1986), 11-15.

<sup>24</sup> A. D. Ravuvu, *The Fijian Ethos* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1987), 18.

<sup>25</sup> Akanisi Tarabe, *Re-Assessing Gender Roles: A Study of Indigenous Fijian Women's Roles in Funerals*, "A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts" (School of Social Science Faculty of Arts, Law and Education: The University of the South Pacific September 2015), 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 12.



Dried pandanus leaves are being softened (left) using a shell. The leaves are then kept in circular bundles until they are needed for weaving (right).



Weaving a tabukaisi carpet mat takes very special skills for the Ono women to prepare. I argue that the “yaba ni Ono” (mat of Ono) known as the tabukaisi in this rituals is of significance, because; it is the sitting throne for a chief where the fountain of righteousness and justice flow out from. Therefore, the weaving of mats necessitates the traditional aspiration of love and faithfulness, because any unfair, unloving or dishonest action cannot come from the new reading of Bible in Oceania. In spite of women’s absent from the ritual

performed by men, women's wealth continues to be very important in any cultural function in the Viti systems.

Furthermore, Tarabe said that funeral without women's wealth would not be considered a proper itaukei funeral. Bark cloth or *masi* is made from the bark of a type of mulberry tree while mats are made from the leaves of the pandanus tree. In Cu'u where she comes from, the pandanus leaves used to make mats are called *'ie*. In other parts of Fiji the leaves are known as *voivoi* or *kie*. Mats and *masi* form the deceased's bed in a funeral and are also used to line the coffin and the grave. They are used in the church as a platform for the coffin to rest on during the funeral service. These items of value are also distributed to various groups of people after a funeral. As a result of all these rural, itaukei women spend much of their time making these items of wealth while itaukei women in the city spend a lot of money to buy these items of wealth to contribute in a funeral.<sup>27</sup>

In the final performance of the rituals of roqotabakau and ivonovono, their gifts are placed before the chiefs who now sits on the tabukaisi. One significant aspects of this ritual mentioned earlier is new life to take places. Tarabe's analysis of preparing the house of death is parallel to the culmination of the rituals aspects of new life. She said that women prepare the 'house of death' for the deceased's next life by spreading mats.<sup>28</sup> In the tripartite concepts of reading into the text, the spreading of tabukaisi sets the ground for talanoa where a new rethinking of indigenous biblical interpretation breaks through in sprouts from ivonovono (coconuts) and rooted in indigenous soil and the shoots grows towards heaven. At this point, the ritual house of ceremony becomes a metaphor for the female body. Instead of beautifying themselves or wearing bright clothes, the women decorate and adorn the house of death with bark cloth and brightly decorated mats, making the house a female symbol during the wake.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 74.





The idea that a house of roqotabakau and ivonovono in this ritual is analogous to the female body when women spread the mats on the floor in the 'above' area, which is the honoured part of the house, normally conceptualised as male. By laying the ivonovono on the mats is equal to the laying of the deceased at this honoured section of the house regardless of whether the deceased is male or female. Tarabe argues that in the house of death, the deceased must leave the 'womb' of the house and end in the earth, as it gives life to the next world. In this



way, women's bodies are tropes for periods of transition: from conception to birth, and from the period between death and the afterlife. This is the liminal period, a transition period considered to be a female sphere of knowledge. Women are the holders and

keepers of this knowledge which makes the house an important part of the transition period between death and the afterlife.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the full conception of new life anticipated in the roqotabakau and ivonovono will no longer accept the forbidden of women in our Oceanic biblical talanoa, nor do we in the Oceanic brush aside the participation of women being ordained in the ministry of the word. That in our co-workers in weaving biblical interpretation women exchange their substance (knowledge) through the exchange of mats is an illustration of the Oceanic as one Spirit that we in the Pasifika use in the concept of building bure together in unison. So, by maintaining the one Spirit of vakataucokotaka sara no one is superior because the notion of empirical rules has already received the indigenous blow and now takes the place of an insignificant position in reading Matthew 5: 17.

### Conclusion

The readers' context in Biblical Studies are normally classified as idiot and of very insignificant in the minds of the imperial "rules." The wrapping and unwrapping of the yaratabakau and ivonovono challenges the principle that dominated the interpretation of a text in the island for a long period of time. Some of those principles of rules are still existing in our island reader contexts. Although not always in the forefront of decision-making, they [women] normally remain behind the scenes...since most of the affairs discussed by men will involve the effort of women folk, it is important that their views be taken into consideration; and be no longer conveyed through either their husbands or other male members of the family at the meeting.

The church in particular, through its theological institution like Davuilevu has in the past till today are still practicing the "*inside coming to the outside*" reading of a *text*. However, the concept of unwrapping the roqotabakau and ivonovono, now critically challenging that method of reading the bible with the imperative message in Matthew 5: 17b. Due to the confusing mass of rules left behind by the religious leaders in Jesus' time and taken up by the "rules" of the empire in the Pacific, the new reading in the roqotabakau and ivonovono are pertinent.

The significance of this methodology has indeed highlighted some of the insignificant interpretation by imperial rules with their blow on the Oceanic culture emphasising the folly of the belief system. I take my stand in my vanua to affirm in this OBSA conference that my methodology proves wrong the historical colonial and missionary claimed that Viti became lotu in 1835. This reading into the text from the presenter's perspective, the beginning of the ritual of roqotabakau and ivonovono was the beginning of lotu for the people of Ono that took place many years before the Wesleyan missionaries arrived in Lakeba. My

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 74.

*I wonder if there is an if that is right*

you cannot reconcile them easily - had a critical element

methodology in rethinking interpretations is yara/roqo tabakau and ivonovono used here as a medium to reconcile Viti culture and the Gospel. The Biblical institution in the Oceanic and elsewhere are left with the task of encouraging a hermeneutical method of the wrapping and unwrapping of colonial rules of interpretation. Where the principle of biblical concepts is celebrated and the island readers into the text is given the freedom to be inspired, artistic, and ground-breaking.

### VINAKA SAKA VAKALEVU

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