

Waka hem no finis yet: Solomon Islands research futures

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Abstract

Research provides discovery in the present, and a legacy for the future. The knowledge gained is in pursuit of a more complete understanding of the world, natural and social. However, research is not a static entity. Much can be learned by examining past outputs of researchers. Never a neutral activity, research is paradigmatically embedded, always with a purpose in mind. Formal research of one kind or another has long been conducted in the Solomon Islands archipelago; it has provided a rich example of Pacific research as unfinished work, *waka hem no finis yet*, which resonates with the bodies of research from other Pacific contexts. In this article, we mine the research past of Solomon Islands to examine the directions taken over time by researchers. We then pay attention to recent research, honouring the work of emerging researchers and the Solomon Island-centric steerage that some are currently offering. Finally, we speculate on future directions that have the potential to further contextualise research, supporting it to reflect local thinking and lifeways, and offering wisdom to the wider Pacific and beyond. We hope that this reflexive journey will encourage Pacific researchers, including those serving Solomon Islands, to fully be themselves in their own spaces. In doing so, may they bring honour to all those who contribute to Pacific research that seeks the common good and wisdom to those that seek it.

Keywords: Solomon Islands, research, Indigenous, intellectual traditions, Pacific, bibliography

Introduction

Solomon Islands is an independent nation state within the Melanesian sub-region of the Pacific. The archipelago has been settled from ancient times, including by the Lapita people (Irwin, 2005; Kirch, 1997). More recently, the British declared a protectorate in 1893, an arrangement that continued in one form or another until independence in 1978. Currently, Solomon Islands is a constitutional monarchy with Queen Elizabeth II as Head of State, represented by a Governor General. The Head of Government is the Prime Minister, who is elected from a unicameral democratic parliament (UNHCR, 2021).

Our interest in this article is to examine the alignment or otherwise of political independence and intellectual independence as expressed in the Solomon Islands research agenda. That is to say, we are interested in the direction(s) in which Solomon Islands research is moving. We pay attention to the aims of research, take note of who is involved in it, and in what capacities; and we investigate the intellectual underpinnings that support efforts to learn more about Solomon Islands. Our first aim in exploring this terrain is to provide a platform informed by the past that looks forward to future research, and which also celebrates the strengths and diversity of the people of Solomon Islands.

Our second aim is to shine a light on research in the broader Pacific region. The precise history of the expression of colonial power in various Pacific nations varies. However, it is fair to say that most Pacific jurisdictions have been subject to colonialism in one form or another. Although as Bevacqua (2010) reminds us, political independence has not been the fate of all Pacific nations, and the general direction of governance in the region has been towards Indigenous self-rule. Shared experiences of colonialism and a common independence-focussed trajectory perhaps mean that a discussion of Solomon Islands research futures may illuminate dynamics across the wider region. Thus, in asking questions of research in Solomon Islands we hope that our interrogation will be supportive of those with specific interests in the research futures of other places in the Pacific.

We begin this article by briefly introducing the Solomon Islands context. We then attend to two seminal Solomon Islands bibliographies to provide historical background to Solomon Islands research. Following this, we offer four exploratory research categories helpful in analysis of the field. We then pay particular attention to some recent PhD theses on Solomon Islands as a way of sketching what might be regarded as one of the frontiers of Solomon Islands research. Next, we offer a tentative agenda for Solomon Islands research futures, before closing with a restatement of the potential significance of our endeavours to Solomon Islands research and, indirectly, to the research agenda in other Pacific Islands contexts.

Solomon Islands

Geographically, Solomon Islands is an archipelago of over 900 islands situated between Papua New Guinea to the west and Vanuatu to the east. Culturally, it is diverse. There are around 80 languages spoken, and multiple cultural groups living within the modern nation state (Dinnen, 2002). The most common *lingua franca* is Pijin, a Melanesian creole (Jourdan & Angeli, 2014) mutually intelligible to populations across Melanesia. Politically, Solomon Islands has had a complex recent history. Its status as a British Protectorate changed in 1978 to that of an independent state and member of the British Commonwealth.

The capital of Solomon Islands is Honiara, a township situated on the island of Guadalcanal. There are few other truly urban settlements, although Auki, the provincial capital of Mala'ita Province is one. Honiara is home to the main campus of Solomon Islands National University (SINU) as well as campuses of The University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). Many Solomon Islands academics tread a path through international academic experiences, including in Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the US, China and beyond.

How and where knowledge is constructed, recognised and transmitted is significant when considering research pertaining to Solomon Islands. Solomon Islanders generally recognise three domains of influence. *Kastom* is the domain of customary understandings and practices; the church is a domain centred on various Christian denominations; formal institutional life is a domain that includes government and other statutory bodies. These domains vie for influence but are generally perceived as significant in the order given (K. Sanga & Reynolds, 2019). There are also private and public knowledge domains (K. Sanga & Reynolds, 2020a). The significance of these areas of influence and practice within holistic Melanesian ontology is connection through layering and differentiation. This means that when matters such as leadership are researched, it is important to consider in what domain the leadership is practiced, through what domain the legitimacy of a leader is established, and how one's leadership in one domain negotiates with leadership from others (K. Sanga, Reynolds, Houma, & Maebuta, 2020; K. Sanga, Reynolds, Paulsen, Spratt, & Maneipuri, 2018; K. Sanga & Walker, 2012).

Two Historical Accounts

Edridge (1985) "Solomon Islands Bibliography to 1980"

It is appropriate to honour Sally Edridge (1985) for her monumental *Solomon Islands Bibliography to 1980*. This tome of nearly 500 closely printed pages lists publications, authors and library availability for a huge number of texts. The publications section is organised in categories such as botany, history, economics and the arts, subdivided according to the logic of each category. Other sections are listed alphabetically.

A cursory excursion through Edridge (1985) reveals three matters of significance. First, although some publications are listed as being of Solomon Islands origin, the bulk of publication of Solomon Islands research in the period took place off-shore. Some works were published in other parts of the Pacific, especially Suva, Fiji. Other seemingly Pacific-origin publications are actually published further afield, such as the *Pacific Islands Monthly*, a journal based in Australia. Most Solomon Islands-based publications were the product of Church and Government activities, although some, such as the *British Solomon Islands Protectorate Agricultural Gazette*, were privately developed. Given the date range covered by Edridge and the limited facilities for publication in Honiara in that period, this situation is not surprising.

Second, the majority of authors' names listed in Edridge (1985) appear not to be from Solomon Islands; most are of Anglo, European or Japanese origin. The origin of names is a blunt tool of analysis, undercut by the fact that some Solomon Islanders use names from other places. Nonetheless, the validity of using names as an analytical tool is supported by comparing entries for many subject areas given by Edridge with her listings in the Literature section. Here, exception lends truth to the rule; a number of Solomon Islands authors, particularly poets, are listed under Literature. It appears that the publishing operations of USP and *Mana*, a Fiji-based journal, supported Solomon Islanders to publish creative literature. Thus it seems from Edridge's record that Solomon Islanders were offered opportunities particularly to publish in the short personal form of poetry in times when long form publications about more public matters were less available to them.

Third, the subject matters gazetted by Edridge (1985) are revealing. Publications on History cover 226 pages, the longest section. Next in length is Anthropology at 91 pages. Literature, the area where Solomon Islands writers are most proportionately represented, covers two pages. Within the Anthropology section, matters of *kastom* are represented largely through descriptive writings about objects such as shell-inlaid shields, and practices such as fishing. There is no readily available evidence in Edridge that *kastom* frameworks for examining *kastom* objects, practices, or philosophies were common in the period she covered.

Moore (2017) "Select Bibliography on Solomon Islands, 2003-2017"

A second seminal and praiseworthy text on Solomon Islands literature is Moore (2017). Clive Moore provides a select but extensive bibliography of Solomon Islands that covers the period 2003-2017. Moore's stated intention was to cover "different aspects of Solomon Islands" with the intention "to enable as wide as possible access to writing relating to the nation" (2017: 3). He includes grey literature but confesses with regards to digitally delivered writing that "largely I have stayed away from this area of the publishing world" (2017: 3). Moore acknowledges two further aspects of his selective approach. First, conference papers are omitted; and second, while the

bibliography is “strongest in the social sciences”, it is “weakest in the sciences” (2017: 4). Moore acknowledges the work of Edridge (1985) and notes the temporal gap between his work and hers, hoping that this will one day be filled.

A brief examination of C Moore (2017) provides much food for thought. Moore’s organisational strategy is alphabetical by author. To add nuance to our analysis, we developed a thematic approach to content, developing categories by reading the titles of entries. As a result, we established a model of five ‘worlds’ to organise thinking about the texts Moore lists. These are: the natural world; inner worlds such as spirituality; the social world of people and their relationships; past or historical worlds; the world of *kastom* or tradition; and the political world. Interestingly, there appears to have been much research conducted in the period 2003-2017 on the first and last of these worlds.

Judging by the titles of published research outputs, work on the natural world often seeks to take account of stresses to environments such as reefs and forests under the pressure of human exploitation. The political world includes conflict, and, perhaps given the timing of the tensions in relation to Moore’s account, it is unsurprising that conflict resolution, governance, and related issues feature heavily. In the case of both of these worlds, the framings of research tend to be driven by introduced constructs and initiatives, rather than those Indigenous to Solomon Islands. These include ecological responses to logging and other over-exploitation for commercial gain on the one hand, and the role of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and the working of democratic processes on the other (Clive Moore, 2005).

While there is an increased proportion of Solomon Island names in Moore (2017) when compared to Edridge (1985), again much publication took place offshore. USP remained among the most prolific of the Solomon Islands-based publication centres. Once again, there is little evidence of references to *kastom* as a paradigm (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002; K. Sanga, 2014; K. Sanga & Reynolds, 2019), despite its presence in the book’s subject matter. Areas that could embrace *kastom* such as education seem largely focussed on introduced forms of knowledge. Thus, there is little evidence of intellectual independence.

Ways of thinking about Solomon Islands Literature

In this situation, it has been helpful to develop a four-way matrix to provide categorisation when thinking about the current state of Solomon Islands research and imagining its future. Categorisation as we outline it below has blunt aspects. Attempts to separate a proliferation of research items using a multi-element interrogation within a four-way matrix are unlikely to produce results that are tidy and complete. However, since our aim is a forward looking stocktake, analytical restraint (Valenzuela, 2005) defends tolerance of untidiness in pursuit of forward-

looking goals. Thus, we offer a tentative analytical framework before supporting its efficacy by sampling recent Solomon Islands research.

Our analytical model categorises research in terms of the relationship between published outputs and Solomon Islands. As an initial question we ask if the focus of research is about, for, centred on, or indigenously grounded in Solomon Islands. The answers forthcoming for this initial level of analysis are supported by subsidiary questioning that takes account of the genre in which research outputs most clearly fit; how the work can be described; the underpinning intellectual tradition(s) evident; the origin of initiators and those in control of the research; the degree of Solomon Islands' participation; the provenance of methods or tools used; and what appears to be the imagined audience for the work.

Some caveats

Developing a four-way categorisation is our way of thinking about the current state of Solomon Islands research and imagining its future. However, a number of limitations and contradictions demand engagement. Of these, perhaps three are most significant. These stem from the significance of context, the taxonomic processes inherent in categorisation, and temporal issues.

First, there is a danger that any categorisation-based model can be read in a linear way so that either the first or the last category is seen to be superior, with the others valued progressively to match. This is not our intent. Instead, the role of the model is to draw attention to the foundations and processes of research production.

Second, any taxonomic process is a matter of best fit. Consequently, decisions have to be made about where the emphasis between various elements should be placed. Not all research fit neatly into one category or another. However, the point of the model is to make thinking possible on a scale greater than individual pieces of research. In this way, trends and omissions can be observed despite (and because of) a best-fit approach.

Third, as indicated above, history and the state of Solomon Islands research are related. As noted in relation to Edridge (1985), there can be changes in the facilities and opportunities to publish. We are interested in the alignment or otherwise of political independence and intellectual independence as expressed in the Solomon Islands research agenda. Our question is a matter of direction. That is, we are asking about where the Solomon Islands research agenda is moving. Our model therefore supports the monitoring of the direction the research is taking, that is more significant than the placement of an individual piece of research into a specific category. With these caveats in mind, we turn to the four categories of the model.

Category 1: Research About Solomon Islands

This category of research features Solomon Islands as part of wider foci. The category includes global reports that embrace Oceania, or regional reports across Melanesia. Neo-liberalism is a political approach that values competition, advocates for free-market capitalism, central deregulation, and reduction in government influence and spending in favour of the influence of the individual. Often, Category 1 research has an agenda of supporting neo-liberalism, Pan-Pacific regionalism (which can be part of a neo-liberal agenda), or the monitoring of globally developed goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Because of the global, international, regional and/or political framing of this kind of research, default to the globally dominant and therefore conventional Western intellectual tradition is the norm. This is apparent in the dominance of Western (conventional) research methods. Research in this category is seldom initiated by Solomon Islanders; nor is control vested in them. Accordingly, the participation of Solomon Islanders is low. A global audience is imagined for research about Solomon Islands.

An example of Category 1 research is the *Education for All 2015 Report* (UNESCO, 2015). This features Solomon Islands as one of 15 Pacific Island Countries and Territories. Solomon Islands is focussed on in this report both on its own and within the sub-region of Melanesia. The report sketches progress towards the globally developed goal of Educational For All (EFA) within a framework of the MDGs.

The research approach employed in UNESCO (2015) is largely quantitative. Census information and school achievement results are examples of data sources. Attention is given to aspects of education such as the amount of spending on education, gross enrolment rates, ratio of toilets to students, drop-out rates, rates of gender disparity, adult literacy provision, and the proportion of youth out of school. The data is generally used for comparison with other Pacific nations within globally framed aims. Specific Solomon Islands contextual features such as distance between home and school and teacher absenteeism are present but do not receive similar comparative treatment. The report offers wide acknowledgement with little evidence of Solomon Islands involvement in its compilation. Beyond very general recommendations, the comparative and descriptive approach offers little scope for positive action. The aim is to provide high level monitoring for Pacific-wide and global audiences.

Other examples of Category 1 research include: FAO-SPC (2019) on gender assessment in Agriculture; Brigg, Chadwick, Griggers, Murdock, and Vienings (2015) on Indigenous dialogue for peace; and Mishra, Hargreaves and Moretto (2010) on the Solomon Islands performance in the MDGs.

Category 2: Research For Solomon Islands

This category of research features Solomon Islands as the focus. The category includes donor reports on Solomon Islands-based initiatives and many journal articles by non-Solomon Islanders. These examine local priorities. Although current practice may be challenged, Solomon Islanders do not generally feature as originators of this kind of research, which follows the intellectual traditions and Western-based conventions that surround donor aims. While in the works in this category Solomon Islanders may have minor roles, or be included as co-authors, they do not constitute the primary authors, or audience of research for Solomon Islands. Instead, globally located donor partners, academics and other interested people are the intended audience.

An example of Category 2 research is *Education for a Vocation or Society? The Dialectic of Modern and Customary Epistemologies in Solomon Islands* (Walters, Benavides, & Lyons, 2020). This article critiques Rural Training Centres (RTCs) in Solomon Islands by examining the relevance and significance of neo-liberal and Indigenous thought traditions to their operations. The article places Solomon Island RTCs in the context of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and SDGs but is focussed on the local priority of providing education that makes sense to grassroots Solomon Island participants. The article challenges some aspects of TVET framing and RTC practice as a result. The writers, from the University of Queensland, were supported by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. Solomon Islanders were primarily involved as participants.

When Walters et al. (2020) refer to the intellectual traditions of Solomon Islanders, this is generally as a contrast to neo-liberal ideas about TVET. This approach allows them to advocate for education that is congruent with *kastom* through elements such as ontological holism, spirituality and village level application of learning. The research employs conventional dialogical methods such as focus groups and the less conventional transect walk, a technique through which students' agricultural work becomes the basis for discussion with researchers. Overall, the critique aims at encouraging donor agencies to take more notice of context and question their agenda of standardising practice across Solomon Island RTCs, and the alignment of the approach with TVET from other jurisdictions.

Other examples of Category 2 research include Lamontagne (2019) on improving justice, Sahin and Shahin (2020) on strengthening governance, Lauer and Shankar (2009) on Indigenous knowledge on fisheries, McDonald (2005) on environmental governance, and Haque and Greig (2010) on womens' economic participation.

Category 3: Solomon Islands-Centred Research

The third category of research places Solomon Islands as the centre of the research. Most relevant works are theses, book chapters and articles by Solomon Islanders. The key to this category is Solomon Islands knowledge production by Indigenous Solomon Islanders framed by Western intellectual traditions. There may be a mix of conventional and Indigenous research tools, and the intended audience includes Solomon Islanders.

The partnership between school leaders and parents: Views of Solomon Islands parents (Wairiu, 2020) is a book chapter that sits comfortably in Category 3. Authored by a Solomon Islander, this work reports on the views of a small sample of Solomon Island parents regarding home-school partnerships. The argument is supported by literature mainly drawn from Solomon Islands sources. The research method used was semi-structured interviews conducted through the medium of Pijin, and all participants were Solomon Islanders. Recommendations made are for a Solomon Islands audience. The study reflects Solomon Islands patterns of life through the voices of grass roots parents. However, Solomon Islands conceptualisation of relationships (through *wantokism*), for example, is not central. Consequently, the chapter best fits a western intellectual tradition.

Other examples of Category 3 research include Rodie (2011) on beginning teachers' professional development, Maebuta (2011) on peace education, Pollard (2000) on women in Solomon Islands, Dorovolomo (2008) on physical education in rural Solomon Islands, Gegeo (2001) on Indigenous identity, and Nanau (2018) on *wantok* social relationships.

Category 4: Indigenous Solomon Islands Research

The final category, Category 4, encompasses research that is steeped in Solomon Islands through location, personnel, subject matter, methodology, methods and intellectual tradition. Such research may take many forms, including forms indigenous to Solomon Islands. The profile of research in this category is likely to include grounding in Indigenous knowledge, the consistent employment of Indigenous worldviews, and the deliberate engagement of Indigenous clans, villages and villagers for the development of Solomon Islands people. Development as used here denotes holistic development; social, cultural, intellectual and spiritual, rather than a singular focus on economic development in the capitalist tradition often present in Category 1 research. Category 4 research is initiated and controlled by Solomon Islanders. Most, if not all, participants will be Solomon Islanders, although it is possible that specific forms of support may be sourced by them from further afield. The audience imagined for this kind of research is Solomon Islanders.

An example of Category 4 research is *Fananau lā 'I Guala'alā* (Sanga, 2014). This first published work in Gula'alā language was written by a first language speaker. Gula'alā is one of 12 languages of Mala'ita and one of 80+ languages of Solomon Islands. The book supports the research priorities

of Gula'alā: showing Gula'alā initiation of, leadership in, participation in, ownership of, and post-research uptake by Gula'alā for the total enhancement of Gula'alā people, and their culture and intellectual futures. The research, review and quality assurance protocols described by the author are entirely Gula'alā, performed by Gula'alā knowledge experts, using indigenous protocols in-context.

The subject matter of Sanga (2014) is Indigenous Gula'alā ethics, a private knowledge domain. Consequently, the development and existence of the research poses a number of intellectual ruptures for the Gula'alā. As a balance, Gula'alā have the possibility of exploring new opportunities to (re)create desired futures for themselves. A tribal publishing house, TNR Literatures, was established to serve the Gula'alā people's aspirations and to avoid engaging with academic publishing entities regarding financial loss-making. In the publication venture, some non-Gula'alā support was sought by Gula'alā. Some explanatory text in English is included to facilitate appreciation of the research at a basic level. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the book is well-used by villagers, its intended audience.

Other examples of Category 4 research include Kabutaulaka's (2002) storying of his grandfather and Gegeo (1998) on rural development from an Indigenous Kwara'ae perspective.

An examination of recent Solomon Islands research

Approach

Having established our categorisation model and explored some of its limitations in relation to purpose, in pursuit of an answer to our question we now turn our attention to some recent Solomon Islands research. While acknowledging the proliferation of possibilities the field of Solomon Islands research offers, practical considerations dictate that we use a deliberately limiting sampling strategy. This has the inherent danger that we may produce a misleading picture. However, we surmise that the directional answer to our question should be observable in any reasonably large sample of research outputs.

Our decision to examine the abstracts of PhD and Masters' theses on Solomon Islands produced between 2000 and 2020 was made for two main reasons. First, we supposed that changes in the Solomon Islands research agenda might best be seen at the 'cutting edge' of recent doctoral and other thesis study. Secondly, the kinds of theoretical and methodological progress within the academy required to facilitate the entry of long-standing Indigenous Solomon Island intellectual and research traditions is perhaps most likely where originality and creativity are valued.

Finally, we limit ourselves to theses available through Victoria University of Wellington's (VUW) internal thesis search engine, and we used a strategy of searching for Solomon Islands in the title,

subject and general fields. Our strategy avoids any charge of inter-institutional judgement while assuming that VUW is likely to be typical in its thesis coverage.

Review of recent Solomon Islands theses

Our search strategy uncovered twenty-nine documents of which twenty-six are theses developed in various schools of VUW at Masters and Doctoral levels. Of these we categorised seven as best fitting Category 1. This body of work includes material in which Solomon Islands is a case study (M. Mitchell, 2015) and that in which Solomon Islands is included only as a theatre in which thought and practice from other nations is contextualised (e.g., Beuse, 2011). We categorised twelve theses as best fitting Category 2. This corpus includes work that addresses and seeks to support solutions for relevant local issues through international framing. Examples include: paying attention to the evaluation of Solomon Islands-based literacy education to improve the education of Solomon Islanders (L. Mitchell, 2011); investigating the concept of ownership in aid projects as a way of advocating for deeper Solomon Islands control (Bax, 2015); and analysing RTCs to identify the significance of context (Egan, 2020). We categorised seven theses as best fitting Category 3, all written by Solomon Islanders. Included is writing that engages *kastom* as an explanatory feature in work with a Western foundation (J. B. Sanga, 2009); writing that takes a phenomenological approach but which also recognises the potential of *kastom* ways of passing information (Alamu, 2010); and efforts to document traditional ecological knowledge at the village level and its transmission (Gomese, 2017).

We were unable to securely place any of the theses revealed by our search in Category 4. However, that which most fully approached the criteria of Indigenous Solomon Islands research is Pollard (2006). In this thesis, Alice Pollard proposes as a framing for investigating women's leadership *Painaha*, an 'Are'Are (a linguistic group in South Mala'ita) term derived from *Paina* meaning 'big'. Pollard is aware of her readership as fellow 'Are'Are and is careful to position her text so it will be appreciated by them. Pollard creates a platform through which to communicate the thrust of 'Are'Are thinking as a critical tool for the way gender and leadership are understood and play out in church and political spheres. A non-Indigenous production process, ethical framework, and language of delivery, English, are typical features of Category 3 work.

Discussion

The issue we set out to examine in this article is to appraise whether Solomon Islands political independence has been matched by intellectual independence as evidenced by the Solomon Islands research agenda. A tentative answer, arrived at from a cursory exploration of the recent thesis output of VUW against a backdrop of Edridge (1985) and C Moore (2017), is that there have been moves towards intellectual independence in research. In recent VUW thesis work, Solomon Island researchers are represented across more areas of study than appeared the case in Edridge

(1985). In addition, the world of *kastom*, generally present in C Moore (2017) as an area of academic interest, is represented more commonly in recent thesis work in conceptual and methodological terms. Category 1 outputs such as UNESCO (2015) continues, as does Category 2 research. These endeavours have their place and uses. Our claim about change is based on what appears to be a more balanced overall research agenda.

Indications of directional change can be noted in both Category 2 and 3 thesis work. For example, recent thesis writers have valued Pacific oralities within their methodologies. Parairae (2017) discusses *talanoa*, an orality at home in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa ((Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Tunufa'i, 2016; Vaioleti, 2006), in the context of educational research in Solomon Islands. Broadbent (2012) acknowledges Kaupapa Māori research, Indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand, and *talanoa* when discussing methodological issues. Despite the lack of Solomon Island specificity, these moves challenge the normalisation of Western methodologies in research concerning non-Western societies such as those of Solomon Islands. Steps away from normalised academy practice are significant because they make space for methodologies and perspectives from multiple intellectual traditions.

Given the processual nature of change, it is probably unrealistic currently to expect to find theses gained through non-Solomon Islands universities that fit securely into Category 4. Even in Solomon Islands-based institutions, the thin Solomon Islands Indigenous literature base, and the abilities of Solomon Islanders to supervise thesis work in Solomon Islands Indigenous languages provide limitations. Category 4 research might be a goal for researchers in post-thesis and/or community-instigated research work where the research capacities already embedded in community life become strengths.

Looking wider, the literature base that theorises aspects of Solomon Islands thought is also developing, providing support for Melanesian-specific research traditions to grow. An example is the growing literature of *tok stori* (K. Sanga & Reynolds, 2019, 2020b; K. Sanga, Reynolds, et al., 2020; K. Sanga et al., 2018; Talanoa & Development Project, 2005). An example of innovative work supported by this base is a thesis on Papua New Guinea (de la Torre Parra, 2021) in which the non-Melanesian writer employs a Melanesian umbrella to support *tok stori*-related methodology. In this case, steps away from normalised Western academic traditions and towards Solomon Islands intellectual independence provide succour in the region more generally.

Solomon Islands-specific intellectual material is also emerging in the corpus of the research agenda beyond our initial sampling strategy. Developments can be observed in the work of individual scholars such as Billy Fito'o who addresses citizenship education. Visible across Fito'o's work (Fito'o, 2009, 2016, 2019) are shifts from a generalist approach to citizenship to one founded on the *wantok* system (Arua & Eka, 1980), a relational approach to connection and social location of Melanesian origin widely understood in Solomon Islands. A second example is Gordon Nanau

(2017) who deals in a book chapter with concepts such as identity, epistemology and personhood as experienced and understood by the Tathimboko people of north Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. The core of Nanau's work is what constitutes knowledge for people of this place.

Similarly, K. Sanga (2019) approaches ethics in curriculum from the perspective on Mala'ita, Solomon Islands to offer "pragmatic, conceptual, pedagogical, contextual and research insights for institutional and societal ethics education in Solomon Islands and other Pacific Islands modern states and to others interested in understanding ethics in context" (2019: 243). Further, K. Sanga and Reynolds (2020a) provide Mala'ita perspectives on positioning, secret knowledge and the dynamic nature of knowledge guardianship. The latter two pieces are published in international journals and in English (with Gula'alā terminology incorporated). The audiences for such works, while international, also include new generation Indigenous Malaita students and emerging researchers who will benefit much from seeing their own intellectual selves in publications. These examples support the contention that the Solomon Islands research agenda is moving towards a position where political independence is matched by intellectual independence.

Where to from here?

Having reviewed the literature, created a framework for categorisation, investigated recent thesis work, and elaborated on the direction evident in a sample of Solomon Island research, we now turn to speculation on future directions. Imagination and action are important to support the continued development of the Solomon Islands research agenda towards intellectual independence.

Careful thinking is required of researchers who want to progress the journey. We tentatively suggest a number of concerns that may nourish thought in this area. First, we ask how Solomon Islands peoples (including clans, tribes, linguistic groups; schools, and neighbourhoods) are to be involved in the formal research agenda. This question requires answers that address new directions in commissioning, focusing and framing, and in the conduct of the research. Matters of ownership, methodology and purpose are central here.

We also ask questions of the purpose of research. A significant ethical aim of the Solomon Islands research agenda should be the flourishing of Solomon Islands people. In this view, research is concerned with people development, an activity that advances Solomon Islands. Helpful approaches to research include catalytic research, that is, research designed to positively alter the research context (Reynolds, 2017). Unhelpful approaches include those founded on deficit portrayals of Solomon Island people, and de-contextualised, universalist theorising and practices (Otter, 2002; Dinnen, 2009). Fresh, dynamic and evolving examinations of what 'contextual' might mean in Solomon Islands settings (K. Sanga, Maebuta, Johansson-Fua, & Reynolds, 2020) are required.

In order to make space for people-centred and contextual approaches, we ask how understandings of research within multiple intellectual traditions and worldviews can be supported. This is a contextual argument that sees value in Solomon Islands research that is embedded in non-Solomon Islands traditions, but which places value on an explicit ontological alignment of purpose (aims and funding), people (participants and audience), and knowledge claims and methodology. If the Solomon Islands research agenda is to support the flourishing of Solomon Islands people, research must be framed in their terms. At the same time, it is essential that research traditions inform each other in honourable, non-hierarchical ways. Historically, what has been at issue in the Solomon Islands research agenda seems to have been the valuing of some practices, framings, foci and the provision of opportunities over others, yet with insufficient attention given to others. While this situation is an irrevocable aspect of the past, we cannot justify its continuance into the future.

The creation of space in the Solomon Islands research agenda for further steps towards intellectual independence is a people matter. It is researchers and those involved in their development who must make contributions here. Thus we ask questions of those, including ourselves, who are responsible for creating or supporting opportunities for Solomon Islanders as relative newcomers to research. How are Solomon Islands researchers to be grown, and what part have Solomon Islands intellectual traditions in their development? For those who nurture non-Solomon Islanders to undertake Solomon Islands research, we offer supportive questions around ways relationships with Solomon Islanders can provide induction and knowledge into the ways Solomon Island-serving research can be shaped. This is a matter of networking and relationship building. Regional alliances of solidarity, including Melanesian and Pacific approaches that value and learn from diversity and do not homogenise, have their place here.

There are practical matters with potential as continuing steps forward. The creation of mentoring networks, a move that has already begun (Sanga, 2019), should continue in expansive ways. Institutions that are well-positioned to foster mentoring relationships include USP and SINU. Actions with prospects include agreeing to, and executing a Solomon Islands research vision and mentoring strategy. This would involve appointing mentors and instituting clusters with the aim of establishing a new generation of Solomon Islands research-capable scholars. Solomon Islands research must have multiple pathways, including research that fits Categories 1- 3. Hence SINU activities include the acquisition of the tools of academic research as practiced widely. However, SINU is also well-positioned to 'locate' its research functions, leadership and teaching around a prioritised national vision and a Solomon Islands research portfolio. This includes giving deliberate, active, capacity-building attention to Category 4 research in ways that embrace and value the intellectual traditions and participation of all Solomon Islands cultural groups.

Innovative networking, including e-networks, is consistent with the activities of USP to support Solomon Islands researchers and publications detailed above. Digital platforms provide new possibilities for publication such as a Solomon Island e-journal, a further potential site for mentorship. Publications and conferences exist in symbiotic relationships. SINU has already hosted significant conferences including the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference (Toumu'a, 2017) and the Leadership Pacific International Conference (Leadership Pacific, 2019), illustrating a capacity to hold an annual research-led conference on Solomon Islands research.

Capacity is not the sole concern of SINU. Capacity would also be developed if ministries such as the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), are able to introduce and implement policies that require all outside, or non-national researchers to take responsibility for Solomon Islands collaborators and/or co-researchers. If followed with enthusiasm, this practice will lead to a place where outsider advisors in dwindling numbers are partners rather than agenda-setters. Similar comments could be made about the development of research and project management capabilities among Solomon Islanders. A step in this direction would be to include capacity building as an essential and highly rated component of successful contract bids at NGO and government levels. As has been seen in the literature reviewed earlier in this article, there is a relationship between funding and the kinds of research outputs in the Solomon Islands research corpus, that means that all involved in the field need to take responsibility for the development of a bright and worthwhile Solomon Islands research future.

Conclusion

In this article we have stated the ethical purpose of research, which is to encourage the flourishing of Solomon Islands people in their own, islands-centred writing and publishing. We have used a review process to frame an argument for the deliberate development of Solomon Islands research that is fit-for-purpose. A historical view illuminates the ways that political changes have supported changes in the research agenda but which also highlights the way that intellectual independence in research has lagged behind political independence. We imagine that this situation is closely reflected in other national contexts in the Pacific Islands region. For this reason, we hope that the conceptual tools offered above will be useful as a starting point for those who seek to advance the research agendas that serve their own people through reflexive processes and agenda-setting activities. In Solomon Islands, we understand that intellectual independence in research is *waka hem no finis yet*, an unfinished business. We hope that our contribution will provide impetus for academics, development professionals, funders and others to pursue with more deliberateness, opportunities to make Solomon Islands research more contextual and therefore more meaningful, useful to and educative of Solomon Islands people.

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