

**PRESERVING LIFE AND IDENTITY IN
ARAGA SOCIETY, VANUATU: TOWARDS
AN ECO-THEOLOGY OF *MALIUDU***

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ABSTRACT

‘Preserving Life and Identity in Aaraga Society, Vanuatu towards an Ecotheology of Maliudu’ is a worthwhile and timely and benefiting issue to write on. As an insider, born and raised in Araga society on North Pentecost I see and experience some of the impacts of the decline in traditional way of life and identity through the impacts of globalization that results in ecological crises. This I see it fit and important to discuss the issue since little much has been said about it in my own context.

This thesis sets out to identify and to discuss maliudu, a cultural lens, proposed as a viable source of addressing the decline in traditional way of life and identity, together with the impacts of globalization and the ecological crises. It is then set out to discuss the nature and scope of maliudu, along with the challenges of maliudu in a wider perspective of the land. This is to pave a way towards a new way of thinking through the maliudu.

This thesis will then guide the readers to view God through the understanding of maliudu in the changing contexts of Araga society. This is where Araga society will be located together with its traditional administrative system discussed in contrast with that of maliudu in an ecological setting. God and the importance of land will be discussed from this point and onwards to the impacts of globalization on Araga ecological environment and the Araga society as a whole.

The discussion will then continue with the framework towards an Araga theology of land. This is where land in the Bible will be discussed in contrast with land in the Araga society and the crisis faced. From this point, different worldviews leading to the crisis will be discussed along with the churches response to land and the ecological crisis. By then a call towards preserving life and identity in Araga society should be highlighted in paving a way towards a maliudu theology of land. This is where theological reflection will be drawn leading on to the conclusion where the discussion will sort ways of


reconciling and redeeming the Araga people with their acquired hybrid identity and traditional ways of life, their ecological environment and to view God through his son Jesus Christ as the true reconciler and redeemer of all. The immanence and the transcendence of God will be highlighted in contrast with maliudu, leading on to their embodiment in maliudu as a symbol and finalized in Christ as the true embodiment for both. The thesis will finally conclude with maliudu as an Eco theology and as an Eco spectrum of life in all its fullness through Christ in his church as the household of life and reflected in the ecological environment and through maliudu as an ecological household of life reflecting the diversity in the spectrum of a rainbow as one harmonious whole in Christ.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 34,297 words in length (excluding the bibliography and front matter), has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Name: Charles Aru

Signed: 

Date: 30th September 2019

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late mother Hilda Musiro who used to pray ceaselessly day and night to see me through in all the works that I undertake, and to my late brother Edmon Hinge whose tireless effort has always kept our home in good condition when I am away, and to my late father Arulai whose wish was to see me through in this journey. I also dedicate this thesis to my children who has always kept my hope alive in this academic journey and to God be the Glory forever and ever. Amen.

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Introduction

Like many countries in the Pacific, Vanuatu is founded on Christian principles and cultural values since the missionization era. The Araga society, located on the northern part of Pentecost or Raga Island in the Penama Province in Vanuatu was no exception for it not only embraced these values, but lived them out in their daily living or interaction with one another and their land. Prior to independence for instance, the Araga Society was fairly static with not much variations in traditional lifestyle and little outside influences. Their living conditions were not affected by seasonal change, but the people lived in a fairly well-balanced world where food was rarely scarce and where gardens yielded a rich crop to anyone who knew how to cultivate them properly (Blessing 1974, 54; see also Kapu, 2014, 21).

Internally, life in Araga was communal through and through because to be so was a means of protection and survival. If they were not farmers, they were herders; if they were ignorant of pastoralism, they would search through the forests or sea, hunting and collecting food or fish (Blessing 1974, 54; see also Kapu, 2014, 10). Through a simple subsistence life style, communes became more self-sufficient. The growing of food gave a feeling of accomplishment, a connection with each other and with the land.

These cultural values and lifestyle became the guiding principles that govern and hold the society together. By the 1980s, following the independence of Vanuatu, these values were not only enshrined in the constitution of Vanuatu, but became the fundamental bases of Vanuatu's societal moral and ethical conduct and as an interrelated framework between human life and life encompassing the natural environment: "That the Republic of Vanuatu is a sovereign democratic state, founded on the traditional Melanesian values, faith in God and Christian principles" (Constitution of Vanuatu, 2006. 1).

This Constitution was further reiterated by Fr. Walter Lini in his first address in 1980 following the inauguration of the nation, Vanuatu. In his address the first Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Fr Lini was urging all citizens and institutions to reform themselves toward the newly independent state. The call also came as a mobilizing mechanism and goal in weaving a common contextual mat on which the newly independent state would be welcomed and settled. This call to reform was intended to establish Vanuatu upon the three pillars that govern a society, Church, land and People. For Lini, these three pillars form the basis of livelihood and spirituality of the people.

However, while this call was done in the interest of the newly formed state of Vanuatu, it does not altogether address the many challenges facing Vanuatu today, let alone the Araga Society. Until recently, one of the biggest challenges facing the people of Araga was the continuous abuse of land and its ecosystem in the wake of social change. A large part of the land and forests has been converted into settlement areas, where human activities such as housing, logging, farming and grazing of animals are major threats to their existence. It is estimated that already a significant part of the land and forest has been occupied and destroyed. Taking global economy as a driving force behind the destruction of land and the forests, Simo stated, "Today, the global economy wants Vanuatu to change the way we think about land: from land as belonging to a group of people to individual ownership as per introduced laws from outside. For Vanuatu's economy to develop, land needs to be developed in a way that truly benefits the national economy (e.g. Tanna Coffee, Metenesel Cocoa, etc.)"(2008, 6). Though this practice has been going on for more than twenty years since independence, no benefit is gained by traditional owners and communities from large tracts of land that are no longer under their control, but are owned by companies and developers.

This destruction happening in Araga may be mainly due to the cultural, political and socioeconomic challenges affecting the surrounding communities; and maybe, there could be religious undertones leading to the destruction. In terms of politics, there is a strong tribal affiliation and support at the expense of saving the Araga society. Politics polarizes so many things in Araga, particularly when examined through a tribal lens, becoming a very sensitive case to resolve. The hazards of the Araga forest destruction are highly visible.

Water resources have been reduced, due to lower rainfall following forest destruction, significant loss of biodiversity, and the severity of drought almost every year experienced in Araga for more than a decade due to insufficient rains; this might also be part of climate change. This is evident every year as people have to get to the sea to have their bath and their clothes washed in springs during low tide. People are acting ignorantly to the claim that there is no relation between forest and rain, without realizing that by destroying the land and its ecosystem they are destroying their own lives. As Augustine Rihai said,

Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life support system. We are called to assist the earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own (Interview by author, 2018).

This thesis will draw its sources from published books both hard and online copies, as well as interviews and experiences. General information through interaction with people and online sources as from Wikipedia would also be used towards understanding the transitions in people's minds and interests due to different situations that arise every day. This contributes in shaping the people's context and their theological perspectives. As Bp. Michael Tavoia stated "human being is the only criteria for judging economic and

social changes for the betterment of our human communities” (Class Lecture: 25 March 2009), thus this is also applicable in theological development.

Research Problem

The aim of this research study is to investigate the underpinning theological factors that contributed to the destruction of the land and its eco-system and/or the abuse of land management system in the Araga society in the period after Independence in 1980. The intention is twofold: to bring to the fore the theological importance of land and its ecosystem to the people of Araga and second, to reconstruct Maliudu in my quest for eco-justice in the Araga society.

The thesis argues that land and its ecosystem is the most important and God given resource in Vanuatu; it is what makes Vanuatu unique and in particular the Araga society in relation to the attributes of God in maliudu.

Research Questions

1. How and Why is land an important form of identity to the Araga society?
2. What is Maliudu wisdom? What significance does it have in relation to land?
3. Is Maliudu a theological and an eco-justice principle? How?

Methodology

This thesis will employ *maliudu* as a hermeneutical lens for this exploration. Maliudu, like many other cultural lenses is an Araga cultural hermeneutical lens. It is a holistic concept of land and natural and/or environmental resources management system being used as a measuring rod in contrast to land and environmental degradation. This lens will be used to analyze and to discuss the underpinning factors that contributed to

the destruction of the land and its eco-system and/or the abuse of land management system in the Araga society in the period after Independence in 1980.

To better understand and address the problem, a framework on 'maliudu' is to be developed. This framework would be an attempt of contextualizing and utilizing certain aspects of the anthropological model from Stephen B. Bevans to work through this study case. Speaking of synthetic model in particular, Bevans explains: "This is the model, I believe, that theologians such as Aylward Shorter mean when they speak of the 'inculturation' or 'interculturalization' of theology as 'the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures...the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures'" (Bevans. 2002, 90). Seeing that this model can dialogue with other forms, maliudu on the same note is open to dialogue and would be used to weave together certain elements of different approaches towards this specific study case to make a whole new concept, which would be the end result in our part.

Maliudu hermeneutical lens will work towards contextualizing different aspects of synthetic model towards a maliudu frame work. The word 'maliudu' has many attributes or essences such as; there is always room or availability to be connected. It suggests accessibility for everyone in times of need and acts as a reserve or relief source for the community when hope is fading. It is a communal symbol for small and wider communities in relation to fellowship. The word 'maliudu' has attributes to both the physical and the spiritual world; it is a shared space for both the physical and the spiritual. It is the space where the two world views meet each other and are in communion. Like a conch as 'a voice from the ocean depths....calling the community together' (Halapua, 2010, 110) maliudu is an ecological voice from the land, reminding humanity of its responsibility over God's creation. This is to reflect the thought in mind for others who are still coming after.

Maliudu is a resting place where God's creation can find peace and shelter from human exploitation in order to procreate and multiply towards ongoing sustainable existence. Though Halapua mentions that much of our theology is 'landlocked'(2010) maliudu itself exceeds this view in a sense that it has a representation built in the sea in a form of a stone fence with different sizes and lengths (20m x 30m, 25m x 40m, 30m x 50m) and bearing the name of the stone alter within the maliudu itself, known as 'voda'. Whatever is within and around the voda in the sea is protected, and in this, ocean life finds solace in maliudu. Maliudu as a symbol of homes to land-life is an ecological 'household of life'. It is the household of life that does not discriminate against any forms of life within the eco-system diversity. One key essences of synthetic model and so as maliudu is bonding of different worldviews or concepts specifically that of Araga and Christian and this would do justice to both as we weave them together. By then we may ask, whether the Araga ecological and contextual world view and the Christian world view be weaved together to address the problem. Is the 'maliudu' vital enough to bridge the gap between the socio-contextual world view and the Christian world view, in utilizing the Araga world view towards a better and positive change?

The aim of this study is to focus on the socio- cultural, political and religious context of 'maliudu' and to draw similarities against the wider world view and the Christian world view or context towards a unified concept that would be utilized. The analysis will draw from the experience where church, state and culture could meet and dialogue together as well as fellowship together either in the *gamali*, the Araga traditional meeting house or the church. The possibility would imply an integrated or acculturated concept of household fellowship where both world views could dialogue together towards a better future where life and identity are preserved and encompassed.

Chapter 1

The *Maliudu* Concept as a Hermeneutical Lens

Like many Pacific countries and societies within the Region, The Araga society, a part of Melanesia and the Pacific, have been living under the shadow of labels since exploration through the missionary period, colonization, to the present decade. Despite the fact that politically, we have surpassed colonization, for most we are still mentally colonized due to foreign systems and concepts that are rooted deeply within our political, religious and social systems and structures. Politically, our parliamentary system is that of the westminster system of England. Vanuatu still operates two education systems, English and French, with both languages as official languages of education. Despite the many local dialects with '*Bislama*' as the official language, English and French are still upheld as official languages of dialogue and of worship for most protestant churches and the Catholics. With such situation we are striving to reform and to redefine ourselves in relation to contexts and the realities of who we are amidst this postcolonial era.

This chapter contains four sections: Section one will discuss *Maliudu* as a cultural concept, its etymology and meaning to Aragan Society. Section two will cover the nature and scope of *Maliudu*, i.e. *Maliudu* as a sacred space, *Maliudu* as a household of life, *Maliudu* as Communal, *Maliudu* as dialogical and *Maliudu* as relational. Section three focuses on the significance of *Maliudu* and its challenges to Araga society. Further to the challenges faced, the section will become a response to and a mechanism to better understand and address the challenges of land and environment within this climate change period. Section four focuses on 'a *maliudu* way of thinking'. This proposed *maliudu* alternative will contribute in the way forward while coming to address the problem of the thesis.

The aim of this chapter is to relook at the significance of land and its ecosystem from the lens of *Maliudu*, a concept known to most, if not, all Araga people in Vanuatu. Unlike all philosophical concepts, *maliudu* is a concept of the heart; it is what determines my world, my life and my future as a native from Araga. To better understand ‘*maliudu* as a cultural concept’ the discussion of *maliudu* in this thesis will build from background as an Aragan.

1.1. *Maliudu* as a Cultural Concept

In coming to terms to understand and to utilize *maliudu* as a cultural concept and a hermeneutical lens to address issues of cultural, spiritual and environmental issues,, Nokise stated:

“Much has been written and said about the detrimental effects of globalization on Pacific island social systems, making them more and more vulnerable, to the point that their indigenous reference is becoming blurred, fading away in many places. Their particular ways of understanding life and the meaning of values that birthed such an understanding are being compromised, undermining the integrity of our cultures and traditions to the point that a new awareness has materialized, especially among their emerging scholars—namely, that a renaissance in the field of hermeneutics, from their distinct contexts, holds the key to a new age of enlightenment that is recapturing their unique understandings of what life means and the patterns of existence supported by such meaning systems” (Nokise, cited in Vaai and Casimira. 2017, xv).

The statement highlights hermeneutics as a tool to be utilized in addressing the challenges within Araga, it also highlights a way of life embedded in the languages and stories of our people as fundamental resources and values to be used as leverage “to stem the tide and recapture their sense of relationality that connects them to their past and present, to each other and to their physical, spiritual and ecological worlds, and that offers possible pointers as to where they are going” (Nokise, cited in Vaai and Casimira. 2017, xv-xvi). In this regard, *maliudu* as a cultural concept has been used to address situations where there is famine or shortage of food after natural disasters, it also serves as a refreshing

site for both people and wild life in times of droughts and on the whole it remains a safe haven for the land, the natural environment and the wild life, and both the people and the ancestral spirits or gods. To further understand maliudu as a cultural concept, this thesis will begin by a discussion of my Araga identity as part of the maliudu as a social construct.

1.1.1. My Aragan Identity

Social location is depicted as an individual's place, a space or location in one's society. It includes gender, class, race, ethnicity, and history and health status, to name a few. Sharing a similar sentiment, David Rhoads, in an essay on 'social location and its impacts on hermeneutics' is cited confirming that:

“...many westerners often have hard time understanding how people from many cultures receive ‘their personal identity primarily in in terms of social groups of which they are part –nation, ethnic group, race, family, village, class, gender, and so on..’” (Rhoads, cited by Cailing in *Spotting the Sacred: Social Location as Frame for the Scholar's Vocation*. 2017, 3).

For Rhoads, social location shapes a person's hermeneutics as it is the way people experience privilege and power as well as exploited or marginalized. According to Rhoads, all human beings are socially located and socially constructed into a number of relationships that empower or disempowered them: be it village, church, workplace or international class. Social location shapes a person's identity and the whole way of life. In this context, I am not an exception, for Araga is my place, my social location and my identity. It contributes towards who I am and my experience in Araga.. As Lini expresses, “Raga, or Pentecost as it is more commonly known, is my home island. Two tribes, Bule and Tabi, occupy it. Traditionally the two tribes intermarry, and we follow a matrilineal system of descent and inheritance” (Lini. 1980, 7). Araga, my social space enables me to see and understand the world around me and prepares me to face the future with determination and hope.

Araga is a place where we tell stories about our lives and how we fit in society. For Walter Brueggemann, social location in relation to land for the Israelites is not only the bearer of sustainable nourishment, but a place of historical sayings and a sign of covenant between the giver and the receiver. He says:

“...land is something different. It is not only giver of nourishing gifts. It is bearer of historical words. Israel had a peculiar notion that land is not natural setting but historical arena, place not just for satiation but also for listening, for words being spoken with their rich implications of doing and caring and deciding, and their strange affirmation of newness...The gifted land is covenanted land. It is not only nourishing space. It is also covenanted place” (Brueggemann. 2002, 49-50).

Social location shapes our identity and way of life. Depending on your social location – you can either be given a great deal of power in terms of voice, access to resources and capacity to make and implement your own decisions. Looking at social location in a more cosmic perspective, Ellen F. Davis stated: “From a biblical perspective, being fully human means to know our place, in a double sense. First we are to see ourselves within the created order-or, to use a venerable and expressive image, to see ourselves within the ‘great chain of being’-as uniquely powerful creatures whose lives are inextricably and complexly linked with those of other creatures. Second, knowing our place means accepting that our lives depend on the physical integrity of the places we inhabit, on the health of water and soil and the countless communities of creatures with whom we share those places; in short, we depend on the health of natural systems” (2009, 110). My identity in relation to Araga and Maliudu is more related to what Davis is trying to express here in line with the cosmic order.

We live in a society where everyone is struggling to have a sense of belonging. That means we have a specified location we identify with, even though many times migrate both internally and externally. We therefore became multicultural and influenced by

many foreign ideologies. Nevertheless, we still claim that we are from a specified location with a cultural identity we are born into which still influences our views.

I shall now provide a brief synopsis of my social location as an Aragan. First, a Christian and an ordained minister of the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM).. I grew up in a rural family setting where life is dependent wholly on land and its ecosystem for survival. My education began at a primary school run by the Church of Melanesia Education Authority before the state independence in 1980 and later run by the state prior to independence, until recently when it was taken over by the church. I passed the entry examination into a secondary School run by state and continued up to form six. Finishing high School, I first entered Bishop Patteson Theological College in 1997 to do a diploma in Theology. I graduated later in 2001 due to the ethnic crisis in the Solomon Islands and had to serve in the field for five years before returning to the same college in 2007 to undertake the degree program where I graduated in 2009. After another eight years in the field, I returned to the classroom here at PTC to do the master's program in theology and ethics.

I was raised up as an Aragan and learnt the Araga wisdom of how to live a holistic life. One of the bases of Araga wisdom is maliudu, an Araga cultural concept for household of life.

1.1.2. Etymology of *Maliudu*

Etymology being 'the study of the origin and history of words and their meanings... the origin and history of a particular word' (Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary) keeps reminding us to always go back to the beginning in order to understand the background of a particular word or term, when it was first used or how it came into existence and is applied. Maliudu being both the god and human construct was first introduced as a mark of ownership, a source of survival and as a resting place, and source of relief and

refreshment after exploration or an encounter of a long journey. It is a source of food, water and other related needs for human use when required.

Historically, Maliudu has connections with an old Araga tradition that foretells the story of an old woman who becoming of age, could not leave her house, and was left alone by her own children. At the time of loneliness and struggling for survival she had to break off her finger nails and throw them outside her house where they germinated into different varieties of yams which she relied on for survival. Thus the first Maliudu was created, due to abandonment, loneliness. The old woman decided offer herself as a sacrifice by being killed; her body was then cut into pieces and planted into the field as yams and her blood then flowed into the ocean turning into udu (polo worms) – providing food for the people of Araga. Maliudu also derives from this oral tradition; though the people on land may ‘forget’ (*malioi*) each other or their ‘other halves’, they may also forget their ‘other connections’, ‘*udu*’ (half/part) that has flown into the ocean as blood. This other ‘half’ (*udu*) may come back later to reunite with the land and the whole creation as polo worms. Therefore Maliudu is all about relationship and interconnectedness; the people and the land, the ocean and creation are interrelated and are continuously in dialogue with each other.

Maliudu in relation to ritual has to do with a sacred ceremony called loli (a pig killing ceremony to gain manhood/chiefly status by males) in the Araga society. The loli ends with a ten day intensive traditional education in the tora (a sacred space in the traditional house (*gamali*)) to gain traditional Araga wisdom from the elders. To conclude the time in the tora, a sacred budding of yam is to be shared with the elders along with traditional prayers. In going out, the man involved in the loli accompanied by the elders then goes to a chosen site and there plants four cycads at the four corners of the area with one in the middle against which a pig with rounded tusks like the full moon is killed. A

stone alter with foundation stones coming from the oven used for the sacred budding is then raised against the middle cycad to identify the site as taboo/sacred. This then becomes the maliudu, a human construct and whichever plants and animal and birds that are within are protected. Other plants and wild life missing could then be added to the maliudu if desired by the owner in order to be protected.

The religiosity of Maliudu derives from gods and spirits who travelled the land; their resting places and the sites of their loli has often become their maliudu. This form of maliudu has remained from generations to generations without changing. Any activities or entries into this form of maliudu have to be reported to the gods according to the Araga cultural belief. Since the gods and spirits own this form of maliudu, they become their protectors and caretakers. Such maliudu are less disturbed by human interferences due to the fear of gods and spirits.

1.1.3. *Maliudu* as an Interpretive Lens

Maliudu in itself is more than just a hermeneutical concept, it is a holistic and life encompassing traditional Araga wisdom with philosophy of life that has the attributes towards preserving life and identity and/or land and the environment. It is a silent response to human interconnectedness to the land, the environment and the so called Araga identity. As Jeremy MacClancy pointed out “If you are a Ni-Vanuatu interested in your identity, learn your language and learn your kastom: it is what locks you to your ground, your land” (MacClancy.2002, 9). Though Maliudu has interconnectedness to both land and sea, and the sky, we will focus more on its relationship to land, people and the environment. Rather than being confined to land alone, Maliudu has interconnections that goes beyond being the house of both the physical and the spiritual world.

Maliudu as an ecological symbol is introduced as a new way of theology in dialogue with other contextual methodologies. Maliudu has both literal and symbolic meanings,

similar to what Tuwere stated relating to vanua; “Vanua has a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning” (Tuwere. 2002, 33).

Maliudu literally is a portion of land of about a hectare or even more set aside purposely for protecting the natural environment and the life within. It is a place where conservation is practiced and no one is allowed to enter the area unless authorized to. Maliudu is also a community reserve for food, building materials and other usages for special occasions and in times of need.

Like a conch as “a voice from the ocean depths....calling the community together” (Halapua. 2010, 110) maliudu is an ecological voice from the land, reminding humanity of its responsibility over God’s creation.

Like a natural mat, Maliudu gives voice to everyone within and around, the common goal of the Maliudu being sustainable livelihood. This sustainable livelihood is woven together by different synthesis of voices from human beings, the land, the natural environment, and even the air depending on the location of the Maliudu itself.

Literally Maliudu is a place where the natural source of food security is kept and managed as a source of hope towards other emergency situations that the society may encounter in life in terms of natural disasters. Maliudu is derived from the two root words, ‘*mali*’ (forget) and *udu* (half or part); *udu* also refers to the palolo worms from the ocean. Merging the two terms results in Maliudu, an inclusive space and a home to the forgotten halves or relations. It is a safe haven for the homeless, the under privileged and the oppressed.

According to Mark Gaviga (translator and historian), “Maliudu is a bank, an investment or reserve for someone who owns the land. It is the strength for the poor, the weak and the hungry after a disaster. Maliudu means coming of age and disregarded by humanity, ignored by other halves” (Interview 21 December 2018). In this situation,

Maliudu becomes the silent voice of such people ,maliudu accommodates sources of human life in relation to God who holds everything in store for us but never reveals through loud voices. Maliudu is a practice of preparedness towards old age and moments and times of forgetfulness and negligence within a community and it remains a silent reminder to humanity of its forgetfulness of the aged, the lame, the blind, the deaf, the orphans, the sick and other disadvantages groups.

1.2. The Nature and Scope of *Maliudu*

According to James Vuti “The process towards getting to the maliudu is like the process towards getting to God; though maliudu is commonly one in the Araga society, there are many approaches to get to it, so as there are many life experiences towards coming to know God better” (Interviewed 20 December 2018). This understanding can be used to feature the nature and scope of the maliudu. Seeing that language and society change overtime, the nature and scope of maliudu may also follow, though not very much depending on the change of mind-set and the incoming influences from the outside world upon the Araga society.

Maliudu in nature acquires certain specific qualities that allow for a range of scope towards its capacity as a capable tool for addressing issues like climate change. In this regard we will briefly focus on two examples, one being the sacred space and two being the household of life.

1.2.1. *Maliudu* is a Sacred Space

In relation to nature and scope, maliudu is a sacred space believed to be a place where gods and spirits are present and are in control. Maliudu itself has two of its kind, one is the gods and spirits construct and the other is the human construct yet both remain as sacred spaces seeing that maliudu originates from the gods. Under the human construct,

there are two forms of maliudu, one is located away from the community or human settlement and the other is situated right within the community or human settlement. In this way, a particular community to be seen as a maliudu of its own. Both the maliudu get their sacredness from the *loli*, the pig killing ceremony practiced by the Araga society. Charles E. Fox once made a general statement that the ‘people of Pentecost(Raga) were war like, given to feuds, fighting and murder, sorcery and witchcraft, cannibalism, kava drinking, dancing and the secret society called the *sukwe*’ (Fox. 1958, 102). Though this statement does not directly relate to the maliudu, it reflects certain aspects of the Araga society, especially ‘*sukwe*’ which is a borrowed term from Mota culture in the Banks group referring to a ‘pig killing ceremony or *loli*’ where both the maliudu get their sacredness from.

Maliudu within the community is sacred and quite unique in a sense that it used to be a place where the owner had his encounter with the spiritual world. It got its name *valangere* from a transit point where the owner used to part the physical world into the spiritual world or vice versa. *Valangere* could either be a specific plant or a tree and acts as a stepping stone for parting or entering either world or this is what makes this maliudu sacred. No one is allowed to touch anything within the maliudu except by permission as everything is being protected by the spirits. In this regard we come to realize that human beings and the spirits share the same world within the maliudu; this confirms that our worldview is holistic; we are one with the spirits in the same and one world. According to Banabas Lio “*valangere* (transit point into either world, spiritual/physical) is the one that makes everything in the maliudu taboo and the maliudu itself sacred” (Interviewed 12 December 2018). Again *valangere* is a point or gateway towards transformation where the physical encounter the spiritual realm and the spirits encounter the physical realm. All

in all maliudu is a sacred space and everything within or under its scope is sacred and taboo including plants and animals.

1.2.2. *Maliudu* is Household of Life

Maliudu is regarded as a ‘household of life’, life interconnected with both land and sea and life that unites both human beings and the environment in the physical world and beyond into the spiritual realm. Maliudu accommodates life beyond death; life where the spirits indwell and life where the gods interact with human spirits or where human spirits interact with each other. In this household of life the physical and the spiritual interact harmoniously with each other. They co-exist and co-relate with each other and share life under one ecological household, the *maliudu*.

Dr. Upolu Luma Vaai in a document forwarded to the Pacific Conference of Churches in response to the vision statement ‘Ecumenically Redeeming and Transforming the Household of God in the Pacific’ (2017) “proposes a paradigm shift from the ‘ecumenism of unity’ to the ‘ecumenism of life’...to navigate a future for the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) that seriously recognizes not only the ‘faith’ and ‘cultural’ life worlds of the Pacific community but also an inseparable treatment of the themes such as ecumenism, economy, and ecology”(Vaai. 2018, 1). In fact this reflects ecumenism in unity with economy and nature. From the ecological perspective *maliudu* is defined as ‘the household of life’. While relating to the land or vanua, Tuwere stated, “The vanua is a ‘social fact’ which for the Fijian people holds life together and gives it meaning. To be cast out from one’s vanua is to be cut off from one’s source of life: one’s mother as it were” (Tuwere. 2002, 36). Maliudu literally as a portion of land and as part of the vanua accommodates both humans and the environment allowing it to be more cosmological in nature; it remains a household of life for those being accommodated and this to come. In contrast, as a Samoan theologian Tofaeono presents it, “the Samoans

today perceive Aiga more and more as ‘*the household of life*’ or the ‘*creation*’ ” (cited in Samuel. 2016, 1; see also Tofaeono. 2000, 1 and 8); this is in recognition that the mission of God in ‘bringing life in all its fullness’ does embrace the whole world. With this understanding of the nature and scope of maliudu is realized as also being communal, relational and familial or even more cosmological.

1.2.3. *Maliudu* is Communal

Maliudu being communal can be understood or interpreted in two ways; one for its use and another for what it acquires or can acquire. Purposely maliudu is not solely for individual’ use but for people living together in communities, tribes and societies. Maliudu serves to support a community in emergency situations such as food shortage, building materials, herbal medicines, fresh air, and being a safe home for the environment, plants, birds and animals and other living creatures. It is a rehabilitation site for wild life and the green environment and a home to ecosystem diversity, a place where all can breed and regenerate. In relating maliudu to nature, Nullens and Michener pointed out that as a community, “We are allowed to use nature in order to serve our neighbour. We are even allowed to kill and eat animals and plants for food. But nature’s resources must be a source of life for all people, not only for the rich and powerful” (Nullens and Michener. 2010, 182). Although chiefs are powerful leaders and remain custodians of maliudu, maliudu remains a source of hope and life for everyone within a community.

Maliudu is a home to both the physical and the spiritual and acquires the natures of both worlds. This is through the presence of ancestral gods and spirits and human beings (2.1&2.2). Symbolically maliudu acquires the nature of a nurturing mother, providing shelter, protection and comfort for the needy, both the environment and human beings. Maliudu is a social space where all within its compounds interact and socialize with each

other for a common good. Human beings are social creatures and have a centralized role to play in this communal space and that is positive relationship with its own kind and creation. Seeing that “human beings are created in the image of the relational triune God and so are, analogously, relational beings” (Nullens and Michener. 2010, 181), it is within this sphere of relationality that maliudu will continue to remain communal for both human beings and nature. Further, Nullens and Michener highlighted “But ultimately it is within the crucible and intensity of human relationships that we can fully blossom as persons” (Nullens and Michener. 181), and further to add, as maliudu, being a relational, social and communal space.

1.2.4. *Maliudu* is Dialogical/Familial

As a hermeneutical tool, Maliudu is dialogical, meaning that two or more parties are involved in the communicative process. The question is whose perspective is relevant in this process? In Maliudu, no particular perspective is dominant over the other, rather everyone in the household is important be it small or big. Being a familial sanctuary of life everyone from parents, adults to siblings are always in dialogue with each other for a holistic and harmonious living regardless of kind, age, size or gender. Taken the example, if there is not sufficient number of insects and flow of wind during flowering season, the whole fruiting process will be affected and there will be not enough food for fruit eating birds, animals and human beings and the whole ecosystem within the maliudu will be affected. Dialogically maliudu ensures that there is always availability in terms of food security and that no one goes hungry. Maliudu being an ecological symbol of communal dialogue remains dialogical all through via its ecosystem diversity.

In relation to the human body, each individual part is equally important; without the eyes, the nose or the fingers, the body won't be able to function normally or actively. Seeing that maliudu is also an ecological symbol of the human body, all it has as members

of the one whole continuously function in dialogue with each other; each member has its own function or role to play for without it there would be malfunctioning or disharmony. Being familial there is always mutual relationship, love, respect and harmony in a free flowing dialogue.

1.2.5. *Maliudu* is Relational

Maliudu is also understood as a relational space; the ecosystem diversity within also defines it as being relational within itself. Being relational in this sense does not confine to a particular setting but extend beyond even to the sea and sky. Maliudu is a perfect symbol of human relationships and relationality, Maliudu as a space of land in relation to *vanua* as Rosiana Lagi stated, “Vanua, for an indigenous Fijian, encompasses the land, the sea, the cosmos, the people-all living things, including spirits, in a specific ‘place’- and how each of them are related to and responsible for each other. It also includes the culture, traditions, knowledge, skills, ways of knowing, love, peace, prosperity and communalism” (Langi cited in Vaai and Casimira. 2017, 187). This well explains the relationality of maliudu as it is not only confined to a particular space of land but extends beyond, to the ocean, the wider environment, other ways of life and the cosmos.

As part of its relationality, maliudu itself is a symbolic form of Araga wisdom and identity. It consists of symbolic forms of Araga wisdom and identity enshrined within the social structure, people, culture and traditions and creation itself. Whenever one comes across a stone alter within the maliudu, he or she is reminded that there is peace and that no one is to enter or go beyond the boundaries with evil intentions as everything within and around is at peace. It also reflects the nature of the community or the person who owns the maliudu as peaceful. The cycad plants around and within the maliudu also symbolizes peace, but most importantly the taboo within the maliudu as well as the level of ranks or status of leadership within the community or that of a particular person who