

Short Summary

Navigating Troubled Waters:

The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands since the 1980s

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The book was published in 2017 by the Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji Islands. It treats the ecumenical movement in the Pacific since the 1980s by providing eight country reports from selected countries and concluding with an overall stocktaking.

Please not that a summary of the first chapter is not included here.

Chapter 2: Ernst, Manfred: Ecumenism in Fiji: Restless Winds and Shifting Sands

In order to understand current developments, the chapter gives an overview on the history of Fiji first.

The Republic of Fiji geographically belongs to the Melanesian archipelago. Due to its central location as well as its economic and political importance, it is considered the “hub” of the Pacific. The current (growing) population size amounts to approximately 837,271 people (2014). Culturally, however, the indigenous *iTaukei* share more with the Polynesian people of the Pacific, as the first people to reach Fiji around 3000 years ago from western Melanesia were the Lapita who are thought to have settled down in Western Polynesia as well.

Christianity was introduced to the country by the London Missionary Society in 1830 for the first time, marking a time of increasing British settlement that culminated in Fiji being ceded to Britain in 1874. Suva became Fiji’s capital in 1882. In order to both increase productivity in the agricultural sector and to spare the indigenous population the unfamiliarly hard work, the British colonial government allowed 60,945 Indian labourers to immigrate into the country between 1879 and 1916. This multicultural constituency has created continuing conflict until today. The current constitution, however, guarantees every Fijian citizen equal rights in the country.

The political history of Fiji has mainly been shaped by five coups between 1987 and 2006. After achieving independence, privileges of the indigenous Fiji's and structural negligence of Indo-Fijians endured in the new constitution. However, the Indo-Fijian population continued to grow, resulting in the first general election victory of the Fiji Labour Party in 1987. This triggered a military coup on May 14, 1987, in whose course negotiations for a new constitution and government were being taken up. But due to results unsatisfying to him, military colonel and Methodist lay preacher Sitiveni Rabuka staged his second coup on September 25. Despite of universal international measures of rejection, a discriminatory constitution that ensured an indigenous Fijian majority in both parliament and government was introduced in 1990 and was not abolished before 1997.

On May 19, 2000, the election of the first prime minister of Indian descent led to the third coup. Demonstrations and the violent taking of prime minister Chaudhry as hostage finally resulted in a military government led by commander Frank Bainimarama and the second expulsion of Fiji from the Commonwealth.

But when democracy was restored in 2001 and a new prime Minister had been elected, troubles didn't cease. Contrarily, ongoing tensions between Prime Minister Qarase and head of the military Bainimarama led to a fourth coup in 2006. Centre of the discussion was the harsh discriminatory policy by the government through which indigenous Fijians were structurally neglected. Even though Bainimarama had originally supported the 2001 coup, he grew increasingly suspicious of the Fijian Nationalists and decided to intervene on December 5, 2006. When the Fijian court of appeals judged this coup to be illegal in 2009, President Iloilo overrode the court's authority and reappointed Bainimarama as interim prime minister. Relations between the government and both the international community and the Methodist church remained tense. On September 17, 2014, Bainimarama and his Fiji First party gained an almost 60% majority in the first election since the new constitution had been introduced, with support from both indigenous and Indo-Fijians. Compared to the one after the 2009 dispute, the constituency of the new government remained largely unchanged. These five coups in 29 years have not only caused the emigration of 25,020 Indo-Fijians between 1996 and 2007, but also a general uncertainty among Indo-Fijians. The change in Fiji's ethnic composition clearly shows that the fear of indigenous Fijians to become a minority in their own country has been counteracted against by the coups – after actually having been a minority in 1966, the indigenous Fijians have constituted 57% of the population in 2007.

The chapter furthermore deals with the historical developments of churches and ecumenism in Fiji since the 1980s. Fiji has mainly been dominated by the Methodist Church.

Nevertheless, there are two events that have shaped the religious landscape remarkably since Christianity was introduced to the country: The migration of Indian labourers by which Islam and Hinduism have been introduced to the country, and the emergence of new forms of Christianity. The latter has gained special importance over the past few decades: Today, almost every major religion or denomination suffers under a growth in member numbers that lies below the overall average population growth. Newer religious groups, however, are

growing in both absolute and relative numbers. The chapter indicates that this growth mainly takes place at the expense of the Methodist Church. Still, in 2007, the Methodist church with 34,7% of the total population made up a total majority within the Christian part (65,2%) of the population. Other dominating religious groups included Hindi (27,7%), Roman Catholics (9,1%), Moslems (6,3%), and Assemblies of God (5,7%).

During the foundational period of ecumenism, the Fiji Counsel of Churches (FCC) was founded in 1964. Its objectives mainly aimed for greater unity and dialogue between different religions and denominations as well as increased fulfilment of an actively Christian, sustainable and just society. The establishment of several institutions that would help reach those goals but also emphasized the needs of common people in particular led to a positive image of the FCC. Apart from four founding churches, several other denominations joined the FCC during the following years.

However with the military coup of 1987, the FCC experienced a slow but certain decline. The involvement of two leaders of the MCFR in the coup jarred the population's trust in the FCC as advocates for social equity and unity. Even though many promising attempts were undertaken to revive the Council's activities after 2000, the political unrests that followed have retarded that process intrinsically. The FCC held very good relations with the government of Prime Minister Qarase (2001-2006) and several further efforts to revitalise inter-church relationships were undertaken, culminating in the formation of yet another inter-church body, the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF), in 2001. The chapter indicates that the aim of the very close cooperation between the ACCF and the government followed a strong political purpose, namely to create "an indigenous Fijian government". Unfortunately, this period of revival – regardless of the dubiousness of the racist policy of the SDL government – took an end when the Methodist Church openly and sharply criticised Bainimarama's coup in 2006. This did not only eliminate governmental support for both FCC and ACCF, which made ACCF basically disappear in public perception, but also divided the FCC from its inside. The results were declining activities and projects, a "silent death". It has not been until recently that the FCC could anew experience a revival, this time on behalf of the Ecumenical Centre for Research and Advocacy (ECREA), a body that evolved out of a sub-organisation of the FCC in 2001. Additionally, theological differences and the fact that there are several umbrella organisations all interacting with regional and global networks show the vast differences among Fijian Churches. Author of the chapter Manfred Ernst states that "the turning point for ecumenical cooperation in Fiji undoubtedly [was] the military coups in 1987". He also stresses the impact of the following coups.

The chapter provides an analysis of field research. Basis are interviews with members of Christian churches.

Different personal understandings of ecumenism are shown here: Apart from answers referring to generally held interpretation, ancient Greek origins and meanings of the term "ecumenism" as well as the Gospel of John, a majority of interview partners emphasizes the need to include diverse religions and denominations in an atmosphere of dialogue, to focus

on similarities instead of differences. This is considered especially important in sight of the several threatening social issues of the 21st century: The chapter clearly shows an understanding of globalisation, climate change, all forms of inequality etc. as major challenges that should be addressed by the churches but in fact are not. A call for the church to provide a safe environment and simultaneously raise its voice can be evaluated, together with certain disapproval of “nationalistic and narrow political outlook”. Instead, it is advised to commonly focus on shared concerns about social issues. This will facilitate addressing these problems, whereas “dwell[ing] on doctrinal issues” is more likely to exacerbate it.

Regarding successes and failures of Ecumenism, failures clearly dominate in the perception of the interviewees. Despite of many success in the rather distant past, especially the establishment of the three ecumenical institutions (Pacific Conference of Churches, Pacific Theological College, and South Pacific Association of Theological Schools), pacific ecumenism is apparently struggling with different problems regarding cooperation, joint-action, and financing. The chapter indicates that there is a lack of cohesion, connections, and leadership within PCC. Additionally, the fact that “too many member churches do not pay their annual membership fees” creates a strong dependency on church partners overseas that threatens the ongoing existence certain ecumenical bodies. The chapter even states that “there is real danger that PTC and PCC may have to cease their operations in the near future”.

The chapter also provides perspectives on ecumenism’s future.

It gives two main reasons for the decline of ecumenical cooperation: a lack of support for the development of member churches that derived from a “refocus on theology”, and the rise of multiple new religious groups. The rise of competitive attitudes by which some smaller churches seek to defeat the established ones is even named as possible ultimate trigger for the break of unity between pacific churches.

Critiques regarding ecumenism often refer to PCC. A lack of communication, cooperation and enthusiasm is criticized most frequently here. The chapter indicates that there is a general lack of commitment to the idea of ecumenism that concerns all parts of PCC, which leads to a lack of dialogue both within PCC and between the different local and regional bodies. But still, the interview partners emphasize the need of a strong ecumenical spirit for the region in order to be able to face the huge challenges more effectively, simultaneously affirming that they see many changes for a revival of ecumenism. Key factor could be ecumenical formation and education. PTC, despite its problems in financing, is considered to have been “quite successful” in educating church leaders – mainly due to the strong spirit of intercultural and interdenominational dialogue as well as the strong bonds within community life. These bonds create relationships which last even beyond students actual study time at PTC. Other interview partners stress the need to make use of the unique possibilities for a strong ecumenism in the Pacific. More dialogue within churches as well as a “more dialogical approach to government leaders” is suggested as possible action tools. This part of the chapter particularly emphasizes the need of a cooperative and purposeful attitude within the ecumenical movement that is driven by genuine commitment to the

ideas and ideals of ecumenism.

The conclusions and recommendations of the chapter outline the author Manfred Ernst's views about the main problems and possible solutions regarding ecumenism in Fiji. It emphasizes the need of strong leadership which has always been crucial for a flourishing spirit of ecumenism. It stresses the complexity of the ecumenical landscape in Fiji that is created by the interaction of multiple regional and local ecumenical institutions in Suva. These organisations are seen to be threatened by insufficient funding by both internal and external partners. Regarding PCC, FCC and PTC, the chapter recognizes different, structural problems that are all considered to reach so deep that the main recommendation is to organize main assemblies that discuss the future of these bodies. It proposes closer cooperation among the ecumenical institutions. In special regards to FCC, it is proposed to extend the capacities of the body in order to make shared worship, shared policy recommendations, shared visions and increased cooperation possible. The concluding chapter also emphasizes the need for churches to include "social, economic and political developments" in their thematic orientation. The chapter generally recommends to ensure an appropriate education and formation for future leadership and increased efforts to curb ineffectiveness in the work of boards and committees that influence decision-making. In a nutshell, the chapter points out the relevance of overcoming the lack of commitment to ecumenism, the structural problems in all ecumenical bodies, and the need to agree cooperatively on shared visions that concern the common people.

Chapter 3: Tauria, Marama Gaston: Ecumenism in French Polynesia: A *Maohi* Understanding that Springs from the *Fenua*

The islands known today as French Polynesia lie in the South Pacific Ocean halfway between Australia and California. The five island groups contain 118 predominantly small islands, whose surface of 1,042 square kilometres covers only roughly 0,1% of the total sea area. Except for a few islands, climate has blessed French Polynesia with rich soils and luxuriant vegetation.

Despite of arguments about the geographic origins of the very first Pacific Islanders, it is commonly agreed that the first people to settle in French Polynesia arrived at about 300 CE, which is relatively late in comparison with certain Melanesian regions. Nevertheless, the first in-depth encounters between Pacific Islanders and Europeans took place in Eastern Polynesia, beginning with the arrival of Captain Samuel Wallis in 1767. The Englishman was closely followed by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville in 1768 who started the era of French influence in the Pacific that lasts until today. Further cultural "exchange" with Europe via Captain James Cook finally resulted in a remarkable cultural shift even before the first Missionaries arrived in Tahiti, French Polynesia's biggest island, in 1797.

The French Protectorate of Tahiti and Moorea was established in 1842. Despite of lasting dependence on France, French Polynesia possesses semi-autonomous ruling power, and the question of independency is fiercely fought over by the two main political parties. The

population is largely indigenous (70%), but supplemented by 15% Europeans (mainly French), 10% Chinese (who contribute an indispensable part to the region's economy) and other very small minorities. Influence of the church on politics is limited to the *Maohi* Protestant Church's decision that no deacon should also hold a high political office at the same time. This decision, however, has influenced the church to a wider extent than it has influenced politics since it has resulted in a remarkable leadership drain from church offices. Nevertheless, it has ultimately helped the church maintain stability and does not depict a serious problem anymore today.

French Polynesia's economy mainly resides on tourism, which flourishes since the opening of an International Airport in Tahiti in 1962. The economy has also been lifted up by the 193 nuclear tests that were conducted in French Polynesia over a time span of 30 years, until they were stopped at the end of the last century. Far more importantly, however, is the fact that these tests have led to strong health concerns among the local people, respectively actual radioactive contamination of vast parts in the region.

Even though French Polynesia exports some agricultural goods, an enormous trade deficit remains, and living costs are much higher than in other Pacific regions due to the huge amount of food imports.

French Polynesia has a general and public funded school system with all branches of education, even though the chapter does not indicate how it would have to be evaluated in comparison to other Pacific regions. The chapter highlights the fact that the church schools provide their students with theological education.

The chapter also gives an overview of religious groups. The two main denominations are Protestants and Roman Catholics, each of them constituting around 38% by dominating strongly on some islands but simultaneously being a minority on others. The Mormon Church makes up a minority of 6,5%, whereas the Mormon Reformed Church constitutes 3.6%. Neither the major denominations nor the many smaller groups have made "attempts (...) to open up any ecumenical dialogue" until the formation of the first ecumenical association, the *Tenete* (The Beginning) which still exists today, in 1975.

Despite of fairly clear personal definitions of ecumenism by leaders of the Protestant Church, who see ecumenism as a common work and movement that strives mainly for "peace (...) and justice", the meaning of ecumenism at grassroots level remains quite unknown. Here, the chapter states a "gap between the leadership and the grassroots concerning ecumenism". But nevertheless, this limited understanding of ecumenism as a term does not mean that ecumenical ideas are not lived throughout the French Polynesian islands. Quite contrarily, the chapter points out that for reasons of independency and proximity, a strong movement of cooperation and support between different denominations has evolved within the Tuamotu Archipelago. The exemplariness of this cooperation, not only in terms of shared worship, but especially in terms of support for each other in daily life's struggle, is clearly emphasized by the author. He also generally states that many of the other ecumenical initiatives in French Polynesia aim at supporting common people in their "times of struggle". Several ecumenical bodies by which a wide range of social issues is being

addressed are named, and the chapter emphasizes the efforts of French Polynesian Churches to strengthen the theological education in their schools once again. Especially highlighted are also the events of the bicentenary ecumenical celebration of the first LMS missionaries in Tahiti in 1997. This event evolved to not only a celebration for Protestants, but for all *Maohi* Christians. The author considers it to have been a “visible sign of ecumenism at work”, a “new Pentecost gathering”. Here, the strong participation of Christians despite their apparently limited understanding of the term is shown most forcefully. Yet on the other side, the chapter also points out that the endurance of “remain[ing] taboo[s]” could become a genuine obstacle to ecumenism if the dialogue about them were to be opened.

Apart from ecumenical initiatives in French Polynesia, the *Maohi* Protestant Church in particular is involved in several ecumenical institutions on global, regional and national (e.g. French) level. This can be ascribed to the strong bond with the ecumenical LMS, the strong identification with the ocean that has led to a historical consciousness as inter-pacific travellers and ambassadors, and the awareness for the possible profits that can be gained through ecumenical engagement and cooperation. The chapter does not provide information on the institutional ecumenical involvement of other churches.

In his analysis of field research for this project, the author reveals four core themes.

First, he points out that there is a need to understand the term “ecumenism”, “particularly among youth and women”. Information and decisions remain reserved for a small elite of educated leaders but should be made accessible to the broader range of the public in order to develop better understanding and wider influence on people’s lives.

Second, the chapter points out that ecumenical interaction and cooperation in French Polynesia appears to work best at grassroots level. This atmosphere could develop due to the islands’ small sizes and comparatively great independence from the main churches and other institutions.

Third, interview partners agree that the two main churches (Protestant and Catholic) are the driving forces behind mutual approaches on social issues and thus “crucial to the [...] ecumenical development in the future”.

And fourth, there is support for a national council of churches, especially in the Protestant Church. But because of French laws demanding a strong secularisation, which in some ways contradicts the idea of a national council of churches that would raise a strong voice on social issues, and because of disagreements between the French Polynesian churches on the extent of political activity, the process of the formation of such an institution is inhibited.

Regarding issues and challenges for ecumenism, the chapter mainly focuses on social issues. The critical economic situation of many *Maohi* is to be emphasized here in particular: Despite general agreement about the need for action against these troubling economic situations, there is disagreement on the appropriate measures to approach this issue. Yet at the same time, there are further reaching consequences of this poverty that would demand a fast and effective improvement. These consequences include not only negative

implementations on church financing, but more importantly also increasing pressure within families that leads to a wide-spread increase of family instability and violence.

Furthermore, HIV – AIDS has developed to a very serious problem in French Polynesia. With more and more people being affected, greater awareness has been and is tried to be created, but limited financial capacities inhibit the campaigns. Additionally, this problem affects the youth in French Polynesia disproportionately, adding another issue to the already existing question on how to get youths involved more broadly. Still, due to a “spiritual strength” and greater denominational impartiality, the author of the chapter holds an optimistic view on youth’s future regarding their ecumenical involvement.

The chapter also considers climate change one of the most urgent matters facing all of the Pacific churches, small atolls – such as the Tuamotus in French Polynesia – in particular. The chapter calls on church leaders to mutually find solutions for these upcoming challenges.

Finally, the chapter names financial stress a problem intrinsically inhibiting ecumenical progress in French Polynesia. The consequences of the precarious financial situation include the forced stop of educational programs as well as insufficient funding of ecumenical bodies that can reach as far as withdrawals from these institutions.

The report points out the several successes of Ecumenism in French Polynesia: The churches have raised a strong voice in all kinds of social issues, especially in the matter of nuclear testing, and the establishment of the Ecumenical World Week of Prayer is also considered a remarkable achievement. But the chapter also states that from an Anglican perspective, the relationships with both its sister church in New Caledonia and those with other closely linked churches in the Pacific could indeed be closer. The author also criticizes the missing existence of a national council of churches and emphasizes once again that no agreement on basic doctrinal matters could be reached so far, even if they were addressed.

The chapter provides different perspectives on the future of ecumenism.

First of all, the establishment of the three main ecumenical bodies in the Pacific, PCC, PTC, and SPATS, are considered to “have been basically adequate for strengthening ecumenism in the region”. Despite of the great success in the training of Pacific Islanders, it remains unclear how these successes can trickle down to the grassroots level. Even though communication through modern media has facilitated this process, it is simultaneously inhibited by a too complicated network of overlapping institutions. A possible solution might be the unification of the three main ecumenical bodies. The author of this chapter would clearly advocate such a measure. He argues that such unification would not only improve the financial situation of Pacific institutions, but also those of the partners overseas who are struggling with financial constraints themselves. Additionally, having all bodies operate from the same place would make each institution’s work more effective and productive. The improved financial situation would also ease the relationship with the partner churches overseas, which, no matter how important, can tend to become imbalanced and thus bear the risk of increased imposition of foreign norms on Pacific churches. The author thereby concludes that a too heavy reliance on donors from overseas is not desirable.

The chapter finally concludes that in sight of current challenges, there should be no other choice than to face them not individually, but “in togetherness”. The author furthermore concludes that in French Polynesia, ecumenism has been most vivid and successful at grassroots level, therefore demanding these initiatives to be given priority. He also recommends to strengthen the ecumenical movement by both establishing a national council of churches and by including yet non-participating churches in regional and global ecumenical institutions. He also stresses the need to address doctrinal issues, proposing to begin with the BEM document, and recommends the regional ecumenical structures to be “centralised organisationally” in order to “promote effectiveness and cost-saving”.

Chapter 4: Casimira, Aisake: Neither hot nor cold in a changing climate: Ecumenism in Kiribati

The independent nation of Kiribati in the central Pacific is home to roughly 100 000 inhabitants, mainly indigenous I-Kiribati (96% in 2015). The small land area of 811 sq km is surpassed by far by the huge extend of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 3.5 million sq km. The first settlers to arrive in Kiribati are assumed to have been Southeast Asians approximately 4000 years ago, followed by Polynesians around 3000 years later. Within a few decades of the second half of the 19th centuries, missionaries from several denominations arrived on the many atolls and by their fierce competition made for a very quick and overarching Christianisation in Kiribati. The modern history of Kiribati is characterized by repetitive occurrence of political, economic, and ecological exploitation in form of atrocities during World War II, extraction and devastation of natural goods, and the colonisation and forced bearing of nuclear testing through the British. Despite its formal independence in 1979, the country remains largely dependent on both its limited resources for export and financial aid from overseas. It is struggling with a huge trade deficit and tremendous lack of opportunities to develop their economy. Additionally, bureaucratic problems inhibit economic growth and development. Even though the state of Kiribati was established after the model of a western republic, the former colonial power failed to prepare the population thoroughly for democracy, which leaves the influence of traditional leaders on governance processes with “enduring relevance”. The chapter nevertheless also states that this system still works in accordance to democratic values and processes, naming the establishment of democracy generally a success. Education is provided predominantly by private schools owned by several churches. The chapter indicates that unequal access to even basic education, declining numbers in adequately educated students, and often insufficient equipment inhibit the government’s capacities to face the challenges lying ahead.

The chapter names several key developmental trends since the 1980s. It can be evaluated that the population of Kiribati suffers under various forms of vulnerability. These become clear through following social issues deeply concerning human rights: Among these, the approximately most important issues are climate change and respectively rising sea levels

with its various consequences on health, nutrition, and particularly possible resettlement. Additionally, the chapter emphasizes the dramatic increase in poverty in Kiribati. This indicates a high vulnerability of both the already poor and those slightly above poverty with respect to even small changes. More importantly, Kiribati is one of the regions that are most threatened by actual and complete crossover within the next decades.

Furthermore, the chapter indicates that Kiribati is struggling severely with “an alarming prevalence of gender-based violence”, with a vast majority of women and girls being affected by either emotional, physical or sexual violence. Additionally, the country’s limited resources do not only negatively impact inequality and therefore development in terms of health and education in the country, but they also exacerbate possible efforts to help people challenge these vulnerabilities, creating a dangerous struggle for an answer on the question which problems to approach first. Author of this chapter Aisake Casimira therefore strongly argues for “active and dynamic cooperation between the churches and governments” in order to respond most effectively to these literally existential threats. He also indicates that this requires a reconsideration of the main guidelines in both denominations and ecumenism. He definitely advocates a “thorough review of [the churches’] life and action”, as has already been demanded by Manfred Ernst and Anna Anisi in reference to the Pacific churches as a whole in 2016.

The chapter also treats with the development of ecumenism since the 1980s. Kiribati’s society is shaped by an overwhelmingly Christian population, with the Kiribati Uniting Church (KUC) and the Catholic Church dominating, but being supplemented by a handful of non-mainstream churches. Especially the Mormon Church has grown to a percentage of over 5% in recent decades, whereas the KUC’s membership numbers are on decline.

The ecumenical movement in Kiribati has experienced some very propitious approaches in the time between the late 1960s and the 1980s. Mainly initiated by Catholic Church leaders in the context of Vatican II, but also with support from the KUC, these two churches made up for the vast majority of ecumenical cooperation in Kiribati. The chapter highlights the short period of lively and productive ecumenical cooperation on the island of Nanouti as well as the involvement of the two churches in a National Council of Churches (founded in 1979) and the regional bodies PCC and PTCC in the late 1960s. The chapter furthermore emphasizes the remarkable “enthusiasm, vision and creativity of the churches’ leadership”. But this strong spirit did not result in an actually substantial improvement of ecumenical cooperation. Today, the state of ecumenism is described as one of “mediocrity”, caused by both several failures to address problems inhibiting ecumenism and external circumstances that clearly tended to result in these very failures: Concretely, the foundation of the KNCC did not lead to greater efforts to diminish differences and overcome animosities between these two major denominations. Instead, both the Catholic Church, who struggled to find an appropriate balance between its historical belief in superiority, and the generally less progressive KUC turned out to focus on the belief that “truth can only be found in one’s own church”. This competition was further increased by the surpassing of KUC by the Catholic Church in terms of membership numbers. The author of this chapter argues that these

factors inhibited an urgently necessary process of reconciliation between these two denominations and thus the development of stronger ecumenical cooperation intrinsically. The not yet overcome animosities of the past still limit KNCC's potential for effective action and should have already been addressed some decades ago.

The analysis of field research results from 11 interviews with most key church leaders, women, and youth. They have shown three different understandings of ecumenism. The first perspective focuses on mutual understanding, dialogue and participation. Ecumenism is to be understood as a focus on similarities while still being able to believe individually, whereas a second perspective emphasizes the need to "collectively address [...] the needs of the people" and therefore promote development in Kiribati's society. This perspective also stresses that ecumenism means belonging to a local as well as a universal Christian family. The third perspective combines the other two. Here, interviewees argue that dialogue on neither "matters of faith" nor on "developmental issues" should be neglected.

Regarding the present state of ecumenism, the field research reveals a rather negative picture, even though there have also been successes. There is a decline in animosities between denominations, but they still persist. The chapter names several annual events that are conducted in the name of ecumenism, especially the Gospel Day that was induced to "commemorate the arrival of Christianity in Kiribati". These annual events do promote ecumenical learning and understanding, yet critics state that they should be conducted more frequently in order to develop their purpose to the fullest. Furthermore, there is a range of institutional ecumenical programs. Both KUC itself and its theological school have incorporated ecumenism as "indispensable part of its mission department" or respectively included it in the theological education. The Catholic Church, however, still lacks an institutionalized program on ecumenism. The chapter also positively mentions the cooperation between churches and the government.

Despite these successes, the chapter indicates that there are deep-lying problems in ecumenical cooperation in Kiribati. The most important of these problems is an apparent "lack of vision" among church leaders. The interviewees mention this lack of commitment to the ecumenical idea as an impediment for the spread of such visions to their communities, for the further development of dialogue on doctrinal matters, and for a common and more effective approach on social issues.

This minimalist engagement can be seen at two examples in particular:

Firstly, the Gospel Day, "only visible sign of ecumenism in Kiribati" and organized by the churches, is nevertheless not attached with any particular meaning, which is however considered to potentially help further increase its effectiveness or demonstrate a kind of leadership in the ecumenical movement by the churches.

Secondly, approaches on social issues still depend largely on governmental initiatives. There seems to be no genuine interest in taking responsibility for ecumenical activities. The chapter states that there has not been actual progress in the ecumenical movement since the 1980s.

This ineffective leadership is therefore named one of the main challenges for ecumenism in Kiribati. Despite of sufficient willingness to promote ecumenism on the grassroots level, this lack of visions impediments the further spread of ecumenical relations, particularly in regards to the youth. This is supplemented by certain structures in the KNCC that work diametrical against an effective promotion of ecumenism. The chapter is here referring to the position of general secretary which is often taken by an already retired person who can not give this job full priority. It also criticizes that by including basically only the two main churches, people tend to prioritize their denomination instead of fully promoting the ecumenical idea, and that by excluding youth and women, who make up a vast majority of the population, KNCC is wasting a huge amount of potential contribution to further progress. Additionally, the current financing does not meet the requirements of an effective promotion of ecumenism.

The chapter also criticizes that the KNCC fails to create sufficient awareness for ecumenical visions and values. It indicates that the promotion of ecumenism has been deliberately neglected. In order to spread these ideals more effectively, some interviewees suggest to not only support people in need, but also to question the deeper lying reasons for injustice, thus giving a voice to the neglected. Harsh critics even state that the availability of welfare tends to be connected to a person's denomination, and that there is an atmosphere of competition between denominations within KNCC. This indicates a strong lack of commitment to ecumenism within ecclesiastical work.

The chapter furthermore defines several social problems that challenge Kiribati. The most important ones are climate change, gender-based violence and youth problems. Whereas the first two have already been treated and explained at a previous stage, the chapter specifies problems facing youth. 54% of Kiribati's population is under the age of 24, making the youth undeniably the future of the country. Yet at the same time, youth are disproportionally affected by problems of violence and social instabilities. The author of the chapter states that "the churches seem to be immune to these developments" and fails to create appropriate opportunities for youth to unfold their potential. The chapter furthermore states that the rise of new religious groups reflects failures of the "mainstream churches" to address people's needs in their daily lives, which might require the KNCC to include more churches since the Mormons in particular are growing rapidly and might even become the second largest church in Kiribati by the time of the next census.

In regards to regional ecumenical issues, the chapter states that PTC in particular, but also PRS have "contributed greatly to the ecumenical formation of pastors and priests". However, PCC is considered to have grown slightly detached from "the needs of its member churches", and it sometimes remains unclear which tasks are allocated to PTC and which to PCC.

Even though these huge challenges might lead an observer to a rather negative conclusion about ecumenism in Kiribati, long term prospects are considered to be more hopeful. There is "much ecumenical goodwill" that can evolve into prosperous ecumenical cooperation if some of the most pressing impediments are addressed purposefully. The combined voices of many interviewees indicate that if passionate leaders use the existing and much promising

structures and relations among each other, if they reflect on social and ecclesiastical patterns, strengthen the bonds between congregations and institutions and promote ecumenism to the public, then a healthier ecumenism can evolve.

The chapter concludes that modern Kiribati's exposure to "dramatic changes" has brought along a very uncertain future for the country. The author of the chapter calls for more tolerance for differences and urges the churches to create a greater distance to both their current culture and their history, which would allow them to critically reflect on them and thus open up a dialogue for reconciliation and renewal. He again emphasizes the need for stronger and more effective leadership while simultaneously stressing the importance of the KNCC's work and mission. Despite of the urgency of the social issues mentioned before, the author also considers it essential to form a theological base on which the necessary approach on these issues can be built on. The chapter recommends the churches in Kiribati to strengthen a dialogue of reconciliation and reflection that questions the happenings of the past and the current actions regarding ecumenism. He furthermore recommends the KNCC to "create spaces" for all those who are willing to promote the ecumenical idea, in order to enable them to effectively contribute to ecumenism with the outstanding talents given to them. Youth and women are mentioned in particular. The chapter finally recommends to rethink both the different structures within and the roles that are exercised by the Kiribati National Council of Churches.

Chapter 5: Garbe, Eckart: Ecumenism in Papua New Guinea: Overwhelmed by Challenges

The eastern half of the island Guinea is today known as the independent state of Papua New Guinea (PNG). The first Melanesians to settle in PNG arrived approximately 45 000 years ago and developed a prosperous and sustainable agricultural system to survive. The first Europeans to discover the island came in 1526, but it took until the late 19th century that PNG was colonized by the Empires of Germany and Britain. After World War II, Australia administrated PNG until the country's independence in 1975. PNG is ethnically very diverse, with almost 850 languages spoken around the country. This went very well during the pre-colonial time but evolved into a problem when colonial administrators and Christian missionaries developed a modern infrastructure that allowed citizens to move around more easily and therefore live together in closer connections. Today, the language *Tok Pisin* is spoken throughout PNG to facilitate understanding. Despite of rich resources which are exported and thus extremely high economic growth rates, the majority of the population remains marginalized in regards to all kinds of social indicators. These observations are backed by United Nations research. All governments promote this concept of resource extraction despite apparent failures to adapt to local contexts. The governments furthermore show little capacity to approach the population's needs, one of the reasons being the still dominant loyalty of decision makers to "kinship ties and clanship obligations". These traditional loyalties also impede the election process on grassroots level, despite of a

rather complex system of representative democratic bodies. Author of the chapter Eckart Garbe concludes that “the situation in Papua New Guinea has shifted from a rather static and predictable life to one in which everything has been shifted upside down.”

Diverse religious beliefs have existed in PNG ever since humans inhabited the island. Christianity, however, arrived in PNG in the late 19th century and was introduced in three waves. The first wave, lasting until WWI in 1914, brought the classical mainline churches to PNG, predominantly Catholic and Lutheran missionaries. “More fundamental and evangelical missions” reached PNG before WWII, and in the years before independence, also Pentecostal churches arrived.

After PNG had gained independency, the religious landscape became more complex. Data confirms that the mainline churches are in decline, even though the Catholic Church (25%) and the Lutheran Church (almost 20%) still make up for the biggest religious groups. Contrarily, especially the SDA has risen remarkably, and there is a huge variety of small and independent churches.

Due to the introduction of Christianity to PNG in a climate of rivalry and competition between the churches, ecumenism developed less from an internal movement but was rather brought to the country from outside. Yet still, when an ecumenical movement evolved in the Pacific, also PNG developed their first ecumenical institutions. The most important one is the Melanesian Council of Churches (MCC), today known as PNG Council of Churches (PNGCC).

The mainline churches, who were the driving force behind the ecumenical movement, put special emphasis on the establishment of several ecumenical schools and colleges in order to promote theological education in PNG.

But there were and are also many obstacles. Since ecumenism was initiated mainly by expatriate missionaries and depended heavily on funds from overseas, the withdrawal of many missionaries since the 1980s posed severe challenges on ecumenism in PNG. Due to a lack of both personal and financial support, many institutions began to struggle with their work, and ecumenism began to decline. Even PNGCC “found itself at the point of crashing” in 2006 when overseas funds were being cut due to “management flaws”. Efforts to revitalize it exist and can’t be evaluated yet. Encouraging example from the positive side is the establishment of the Divine World University (DWU) which provides, among four other faculties, theological education, is open to students from all regions and denominations and has gained considerable international reputation.

The analysis of field research provides data from over 45 interview partners and talanoa participants.

The understanding of ecumenism points to the fact that ecumenism is understood on a very pragmatic and earthly level, without many deliberations regarding doctrinal or theological issues. Most interview partners focus on cooperation and understanding between churches, that derives from a common faith in Jesus Christ and can help the churches address people’s needs. However, the chapter also hints that, in sight of PNG’s mission history and ethnical diversity, a common approach to ecumenism might be helpful.

The interviewees perceive several challenges for ecumenism in PNG. First of all, as Father Gibbs states in one of the interviews, “there is a diminishment of interest in ecumenical relations”. Closely related to this is the uprising of various small churches which are less committed to ecumenism. For the mainline churches, this poses the questions of how to find ways of cooperating with them. Such new forms of cooperation also emerge on a level of approaches to social problems. PNG suffers under a serious damage of social cohesion, with multiple forms of violence emerging out of it. Whereas there is vast agreement that these issues are urgent, churches disagree on their own ability to approach them apart from cooperation with the government. However, this cooperation is also becoming increasingly difficult and especially a threat for ecumenism since the uprising of the small churches has triggered greater competition for governmental funds. This competition impedes a healthy ecumenical cooperation between churches. Additionally, the PNGCC, as mentioned previously, lacks several functioning boards and therefore capacities to become active. It nevertheless still cooperates with the government and local actors. Despite of all of these obstacles, several interviewees emphasize the urgent need to collectively address these very concerning issues.

Another section of the chapter treats the topic of church and politics in PNG. According to the chapter, this discussion was triggered by the attempt of Speaker of Parliament Hon. Theodore Zurenuoc to create a feeling of unity among PNG’s. This national unity would then help transform PNG “into a God-fearing and prosperous nation”. The huge discussion about this attempt indicates how discordant PNG church leaders are in regards to the relationship between church and state. Yet still, church leaders are closely connected to politics and likewise. The chapter also states that the uprising of Pentecostal churches has brought up a movement that seeks to officially connect Church and state very closely in the manner of Zionist ideas. For example, speaker Zurenuoc sparked a serious discussion again when he decided to bring the contentious King James Version Bible to PNG. This dispute went far enough for most mainline churches to openly reject this political action. The section concludes that these two attempts illustrate the huge potential religious ideas have to influence the public in PNG.

One of the successes of the PNG churches has been their historic contribution to society. The capacity of churches “to make their collective voice heard” gives them an important role, for example as peacemakers. A more complex topic is the churches’ cooperation with the government as “providers of social services”. While the churches’ historical success in the provision of health and education remains undisputed, the state – church partnership that was launched in 2004 is criticized in some regards. The most important points of criticism are the involvement of Australian aid, which makes the movement one that is driven from outside, a lack of critical attitudes towards the government among church leaders, and the danger of an decreasing commitment to social involvement because the churches might rely on the governments to solve problems for them. Despite these minor concerns, the chapter states that this Church Partnership Programme (CPP) is “generally seen as a success”,

experiences support by most interviewees and has gained “good reputation in PNG”. From an ecumenical perspective on education, a “mixed picture” arises. Most educational institutions are run separately by the several churches without much cooperation. Yet in tertiary education, most institutions certainly strive to be multi-denominational, even though the chapter states that this is only accomplished with “certain limits” and “inbuilt reservations”.

But there are also impediments to ecumenical cooperation. First of all, many churches are divided within themselves which makes it difficult to form unity with other churches. Second, the complicated social situation in PNG, for example the differences between rural and urban areas or the slow fading of “communal relations”, makes it difficult for churches to elaborate the appropriate direction in which they should aim. Third, doctrinal, historic, theological, and biblical barriers and obstacles, which are not really discussed, and competition between churches inherently impede ecumenical cooperation. And fourth, the chapter states that PNG lacks support by the regional bodies PCC, PTC, and SPATS. Several interviewees wish for more involvement in terms of visits, guidelines and invitations to conferences that are not provided by PCC, especially since PNGCC has lost many of its capacities.

Looking ahead, the chapter repeatedly emphasizes the urgent social issues that need to be addressed in none but a collective way. Competition between and within churches, on an institutional as well as a congregational level, is considered to strongly inhibit ecumenical progress. The chapter stresses the huge potential of the churches to influence public opinion as well as governmental decisions. It has a positive perspective on cooperation between different denominations and the participation of women and youth in church activities, but it also criticizes that these important groups are not being given sufficient say in decision making processes. A trend that gives hope for the future is the willingness of “next – generation activists” to “accept fresh ideas” and thereby contribute to social change. Yet at the same time, a “turnaround” is not being expected soon – no matter how urgently needed.

In his concluding section, the author of this chapter gives several recommendations regarding ecumenism in PNG. They could be summed up as the following:

To strengthen education in regards to theological education, ecumenical education, education of women and youth, and life-long learning.

To strengthen dialogue on both ecumenism and the churches’ role in social development.

To “reshape PNGCC” into a supportive and active organisation.

To actively seek for support by regional organisations.

To discuss the exact role of churches in state-church cooperation.

And finally, to discuss these initiatives collectively.

Chapter 6: Nokise, Feleterika: Ecumenism in the Navigators' Archipelago – an elusive Reality: Samoa and American Samoa

The chapter treats both Samoa and American Samoa in one report, since there is a shared historical, ecclesiastical, and cultural background. It begins with an introduction to historical, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

The Polynesian islands of Samoa made first contact with Europeans and Christianity during the 18th and beginning 19th century. Before the following “religious upheaval”, a traditional and strongly locally rooted religion already existed. The introduction of Christianity, however, has not only changed the religious affiliation of Samoans, but has also included several elements of “Western civilization”, for example literacy, that have shaped the development of Samoa remarkably.

The chapter assesses that despite of the universal success of Christianisation in mere terms of conversion, the early competition between the different denominations has created a spirit of disunity that inhibits ecumenism until today. It furthermore indicates that the claim of the missionaries on universal societal transformation has undermined the original Samoan culture.

The imperial ambitions of the European powers also sparked a race for the domination over Samoa that ended in the partition of the islands into two parts: A Western Part under German occupation, today known as the independent state of Samoa (since 1962), and an Eastern part that is under the ultimate authority of the United States (American Samoa). Whereas the Germans, until the end of their occupation in 1914, and the Americans until today are considered to have made a remarkable effort to “understand the principles and values that defined and shaped the political life” of Samoans, the time of New Zealand’s rule was characterized by “resentment” and “arrogance”. In both Samoa and American Samoa, the attempt to balance their traditional culture with Western influences remains a key struggle in Samoans’ public and private life.

Each country is given an independent part on the Churches and Ecumenism since the 1980s. The first of the two parts deals with the history of Samoa.

Regarding the understanding of ecumenism, the chapter states that opinions vary, depending on involvement and position in ecumenism and the church. It indicates that a first group, Samoa’s women, tend to have a practical and grounded understanding of ecumenism which is expressed, for example, in shared prayer and worship. Samoa’s men, a second group, often hold more abstract views on ecumenism. Their diverse opinions might be summed up in a way that they emphasize the universal oneness of God that is to be sought. A third group, which is largely confined to church leaders, sees ecumenism more as a desirable goal that can be reached by cooperation, which will lead to the ultimate unity of churches. The chapter also indicates that this understanding does not include the grassroots-level but is limited to negotiations and exchange between high church officials.

The National Council of Churches is by far considered the most important contributor to ecumenism in Samoa. Despite of a general acknowledgment for the importance of ecumenism and a certain level of expectation towards the NCC, both its effectiveness in promoting ecumenical cooperation and its representative status are contested. Critics state that the NCC fails to address issues regarding the youth as well as other social issues that are currently not on top of the NCC's agenda. Furthermore, the chapter strongly indicates that there is neither sufficient dialogue on theological differences within KCC nor willingness to start a dialogue with other churches who are not yet a member of KCC. Additionally, the KCC is struggling with a lack of financial funding.

There is considerable cooperation with other ecumenical organisations in regards to theological education. CCCS and MCS have not only supported the foundation of both PCC and PTC, but still value the opportunities given by these ecumenical organisations, PTC in particular. There is also cooperation with different theological colleges and churches outside of Samoa. Ecumenism on village level exists only when initiated by higher institutions. However, author of the chapter Feleterika Nokise concludes that neither CCCS nor MCS can be called ecumenical churches due to a lack of "ecumenical theology".

The chapter names several issues and challenges facing ecumenism in Samoa. The first one to be mentioned in the chapter is financial constraints. The chapter indicates that there is a kind of vicious circle that includes poverty and financial dependency, which leads to insufficient financial support for first the churches and then the KCC, which ultimately prohibits the KCC from its task to address social issues - such as poverty. In combination with the previously mentioned lack of effectiveness in promoting ecumenical cooperation, the KCC is threatened by a growing loss of credibility. This includes a lack of faith in the leaders' ability to initiate and cooperate. Despite of willingness to strengthen cooperation with regional ecumenical bodies, there seem to be certain misunderstandings and disagreements regarding financing and communication, especially between KCC and PCC. On grassroots level, the chapter assesses an overall lack of ecumenical spirit but positively highlights the example of women's fellowships' cooperation among each other, as well as their approaches on social issues, as a "model for what ecumenism can and should be in Samoa".

Regarding the appropriate ways to address these issues and challenges, however, author Feleterika Nokise assesses that there are hardly any efforts that work towards broader and more effective cooperation. Instead, he indicates that the churches are rather focusing on their doctrinal differences because this helps them to maintain their current position in society. However, it is also added that there is faith among interview partners in the potential of ecumenism to flourish if the churches were to promote it.

There seems to be "broad agreement" that the communication between NCC and PCC, respectively its member churches, and therefore in the end the communication between PCC and the member churches of NCC, currently suffers. However, it is not agreed on whether it is structural measures or different leaders that are needed if the communication is to be improved.

In regards to perspectives on ecumenism's future, the chapter concludes what it has already indicated in the previous sections: There is insufficient participation in ecumenical activities in Samoa, and even though there are some small successes, namely the cooperation with PCC and PTC as well as approaches to strengthen cooperation in theological education within Samoa itself, a remarkably new way of treating ecumenism is needed if this situation is to be reversed.

The chapter provides the same overview on churches and ecumenism since the 1980s about American Samoa in part two.

Whereas some interview partners refer to linguistic, biblical or cultural origins and backgrounds of the term when asked for their understanding of ecumenism, a broad majority highlights the universal relationships, particularly between churches, that are needed to actually live ecumenism and therefore fulfill the vision of a "Christian unity" that is "practiced in all spheres of society".

The state of ecumenism is mainly regarded in comparison to ecumenical cooperation in the 1980s. From this perspective, interview partners state that there is a decline in ecumenical cooperation. However, there is still not only a National Council of Churches (NCC), but also a basic commitment to ecumenism by various churches. Possible reasons, given by various interview partners, for the decline of ecumenism range from diverse changes in cultural and social environments to manifested doctrinal differences. The chapter emphasizes the need to "assess all of these factors" if ecumenism is to be revived.

Some of the issues and challenges for ecumenism in American Samoa are indicated quite precisely by the respective subheadings which author Feleterika Nokise has given to them: There is a lack of understanding of ecumenism, mainly because the existing one is often an egocentric one, there is a need to confront social ills, such as alcoholism and several forms of violence, and there is a lack of cooperation among church leaders, which tends to also stifle ecumenism on lower levels. Ecumenism also needs to address prevailing identity crisis, caused by increased influence of previously foreign cultures, naturally American elements in particular. A decrease in church membership, which includes Youths "migrating [...] to the Pentecostal churches", and insufficient support for educational and development programs exacerbate approaches on these challenges additionally.

The (regular) ecumenical cooperation on grassroots, national, and regional level is generally seen as a success for ecumenism in American Samoa. Especially the cooperation with and support for PCC and PTC is highlighted throughout this section. However, the chapter names various failures as well. Among a "lack of commitment [to the ecumenical idea] from member churches", structural deficiencies in CCCAS' missionary department, and certain failures of PCC that have been treated in greater detail in the Fiji country report, the chapter emphasizes that denominationalism and thus the inability of denominations to focus on commons rather than differences is often a severe obstacle to ecumenical cooperation.

In regards to perspectives on ecumenism's future, the chapter states that there is not only an apparent lack of communication between the different levels of authority within

churches, but also between regional and national bodies. Thus, the churches' basis sometimes stays as misinformed about national activities as national leaders are about regional structures. A point that has been mentioned repeatedly throughout the chapter is taken up again, namely the fact that cooperation with partners overseas often stays limited to receiving financial funds instead of extending it to an equitable relationship of dialogue and exchange. It is also "common view" that these, respectively all, funds are intrinsically important if the ecumenical movement is to foster in the future. The dependency on funds from overseas should mitigate if possible. It is expressed that not only all churches should continue their work in NCC, but also that this body should try to include non-mainline denominations as well.

The chapter's conclusion begins by referring to its heading: "Ecumenism is an elusive reality in the life and work of the churches". There are regular ecumenical activities in both countries, but what misses is an overall comprehensive spirit of ecumenism that really calls for common expression of faith and change in its various dimensions.

The chapter recommends to conduct workshops that will strengthen every churches' consciousness for ecumenism, to incorporate ecumenism in the churches' structures, and to open up ecumenical dialogue with churches currently not involved in NCC.

Chapter 7: Hamlyn, Glenine: Strongest in Crisis? Ecumenism in Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands, a group of about 1000 islands which is located between PNG and Vanuatu, have gained independence on July 7, 1978. The economy is mainly dependent on subsistence agriculture, and the demography shows a large proportion of the population to be youths.

95% of the population are Christians, with five churches dominating the religious landscape: The Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACOM, 31,9%), the Roman Catholic Church (19,6%), the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC, 17,1%), the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA, 11,7%), and the United Church in Solomon Islands (UCSI, 10,1%). These churches are supplemented by several smaller, mainly Pentecostal churches.

The current situation in Solomon Islands has been largely influenced by the years between 1998 and 2003, the time of "the tension". "The tension" was an ethnical conflict, including a political coup and a civil war, which has had lasting impact on the population in terms of violence, displacement and insecurity. The chapter states that the causes of "the tension" have not been "satisfactorily addressed" after the conflict had ended officially in 2003.

The chapter indicates that ecumenical cooperation, at least on institutional level, began with the foundation of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) in 1967, even though the organization included only the five mainline churches, and only the ACOM, the Catholic Church, and what is today the UCSI were full members. SICA had an instrumental role in giving both moral and material support for those who were most severely affected by "the tension". Nowadays, SICA also includes a Federation of Women (SICAFOW) which allows

women to address the currently most pressing matters via workshops, days of prayer or other activities.

The chapter states that today, SICA suffers a serious crisis: Its facilities in the country's capital, Honiara, are not equipped sufficiently, there is a lack of financing, and people on both leadership and congregational level seem to have lost confidence in SICA's vision and work. There is willingness to maintain SICA in general, but those (few) ideas that are proposed by interviewees can apparently not be agreed on by all churches. In fact, the only way to solve the financial problem would be to raise the churches' contribution, which they currently can not afford. A proposal to include government funding has also been made but could so far not win sufficient support.

The most important role of SICA, as highlighted by interview partners, is to be a "prophetic voice" that strengthens the churches role and influence in Solomon Islands. However, SICA is not the only ecumenical organization in Solomon Islands: The Solomon Islands Full Gospel Association (SIFGA) gives all those churches which are not included in SICA, which are mainly Pentecostal Churches, an opportunity to express their own opinion. Unfortunately, cooperation between these two organizations is limited and there are complaints that SIFGA is not appropriately included in regional ecumenical processes and activities.

The different ways in which ecumenism is understood include not only the focus on a united Christian family, but also on its interconnection with issues happening outside of the churches, e.g. social issues. Reconciliation is named repeatedly as a matter of great importance for ecumenism.

The regional ecumenical bodies PTC, PCC and SPATS are all acknowledged in their importance. However, whereas PTC is particularly highlighted in sight of its huge contribution to culturally ecumenical learning, there are complains about a lack of communication and governance by PCC, and SPATS is often not really known to interview partners. As in many other pacific countries, many interview partners consider the structure of regional bodies and their respective responsibilities to be confusing, with some of them favoring a "joint governance body".

The churches' "peacemaking role" during "the tension", the cooperation with PTC and several ecumenical meetings or events of exchange are considered the biggest successes of ecumenism by interview partners. However, especially the "dysfunctional state of SICA" is largely considered a major failure. This includes failures to improve the situation of people on grassroots level, an insufficient connection to it, and a lack of genuine attempts to "speak up" against social wrongs in Solomon Islands.

The chapter names several challenges for ecumenism in Solomon Islands.

First of all, the proliferation of New Religious Groups (NRGs) has made the religious landscape in Solomon Islands more complex. The chapter indicates that the structure of the mainline churches does not respond to people's needs according to the changes brought by current developments. For example, in services they focus on men rather than women despite of the fact that it is women who tend to go to church more frequently, and they

seem to fail at giving people a comforting structure in times of changing social pattern and rules.

Second, churches seem to prefer members of their own church as staff which inhibits their progress in terms of both skills and ecumenical learning.

Third, the chapter indicates that church leaders are not able to approach social and environmental issues sufficiently, and the fact that only few women are being ordained deprives the churches of enormous potential for better leadership.

Fourth, the Solomon Islands churches are challenged by their relationships with oversea partners, more precisely by the task of how to maintain their cultural independency in the light of the following inner conflict: The churches see themselves threatened by the growing financial influence from overseas because it might undermine their own culture, since donors understandably have an interest in knowing what the money is used for and could therefore end up imposing their own structural processes on SI cultures. Yet at the same time, the SI churches do not want to merely make use of the money but are willing to embrace the donors as equal partners in a relationship of mutual sharing and learning which unavoidably involves cooperating with them on more than just financial level.

Additionally, ecumenism in Solomon Islands is confronted with several political, economic, and environmental challenges.

Regarding the phenomenon of corruption, one of the interview partners argues that it is not the individual politician alone whose moral imperfection causes him to be corrupt, but rather the interplay with cultural expectancies that causes so many cases of corruption. Globalization has impacts on Solomon Islands as well, particularly through multinational logging and mining respectively the unequal distribution of profits. Land disputes are an additional issue, being one of the main reasons for people to move – not only in terms of physical relocation, but also in terms of a reconsideration of their belonging to a certain church. In a nutshell, people can change their religious affiliation due to these land disputes. A proposal that has already been made to the public suggests that tracing back land ownership could help solve this problem.

Climate change affects low-lying areas in Solomon Islands as it does in any other pacific country, and there is awareness for the upcoming issue of climate refugees from other pacific states.

The chapter indicates that violence against women is a particularly serious problem. Despite of slow changes in attitudes and behavior, the idea of a patriarchal society is rooted deeply in Solomon Island culture and thus requires “fundamental attitudinal change”. The fact that this problems applies to almost every Solomon Island context, while a vast majority of Solomon Islanders is Christian, makes this issue in particular one that calls for an ecumenical response by all churches.

Youth also faces several problems, ranging from unemployment over alcoholism to early pregnancy. Additionally, there is a cultural conflict between youths and older generation that derives from changes rapid enough to break traditional norms and customs, which clearly creates a serious distance between the two groups.

Last but not least, the Solomon Island churches are also challenged by the various issues “impacting on the Pacific region as a whole”, which includes diverse effects of post-colonialism as well as all forms of inequality and violence.

Interview partners express a general optimism that ecumenical cooperation will not cease in the near future, neither on grassroots, nor on interchurch level. A lot of it might depend on how future church leaders include women in particular and generally manage to maintain their church’s connection and cooperation with SICA and regional organizations.

The chapter concludes that, despite of an existing willingness to get into dialogue and simultaneously getting active in combined strength, the main body to channel these attempts, SICA, does not experience sufficient support and additionally fails to cast forth the spirit needed to promote cooperation and progress. There is lack of communication, a lack of financing, and women in general are largely excluded from the ecumenical movement in male-dominated churches. The chapter phrases the need to raise a shared voice to both government and people, regarding the challenges named in the previous section, and the need to support women and youth in their efforts to get involved ecumenically. There is also a need for dialogue between SICA and SIFGA. The chapter calls upon the churches to listen and respond to the voices of the people at the congregational level. The chapter recommends some very detailed suggestions concerning the structure of SICA that can be extracted from the original book.

Chapter 8: Casimira, Aisake: A battered *Vaka* in Swirling Waters: Ecumenism in Tonga

The Kingdom of Tonga can be considered to be mainly composed of its three main islands, with a vast majority of the approximately 106 000 people (2015 census) living on one of these three. Culturally and geographically, Tonga belongs to the region of Polynesia. There is not a single non-Christian religious group with even smallest influence respectively membership numbers.

Early contact with Christian missionaries has existed since the beginning of the 19th century, and after a period of British rule in the form of a protectorate, Tonga gained full independence in 1970. It is a constitutional monarchy that gives “almost absolute political power” to the king. However, the emergence of a pro-democratic movement has not only reshaped the political landscape of Tonga’s political system by sparking a serious debate about the legitimacy of the current constitution, but also greatly influenced the ecumenical movement in Tonga (as is shown at a later stage of the chapter).

The most important socio – political and economic trends are vital to church leaders because they are automatically issues that need to be addressed by the churches as well.

The system of aristocracy by nature allocates resources unequally, creating “one of the widest gaps between rich and poor in the Pacific”. Unemployment and poverty are remarkably high. Today, this “system of power concentration” is, increasingly fraught with tension, questioned by a pro-democratic movement backed by both an “educated elite” and

“a growing number of ordinary people”. Closely connected to this conflict are issues of human rights which have also sparked protest and dissatisfaction ever since the 1970’s. Non-communicable diseases face an overwhelming 99,9% majority of Tongan society and are unfortunately considered to be mainly driven by external influences, which complicates effective approaches on this issue. Gender-based violence and youths threatened by different ways to get into a social race to the bottom, via unemployment, teenage pregnancy, or alcoholism and drug abuse, are also key challenges that require “serious attention”.

The ecumenical movement in Tonga was in great parts influenced by three outstanding leaders who were responsible for what author Aisake Casimira considers to possibly have been the “most invigorating of the national movements”. All three leaders had in common a special “charisma, passion and determination” by which they made the ecumenical movement in Tonga flourish.

The chapter sets the date of the first serious ecumenical interaction in Tonga on 1973, yet it took another 14 years until the Tonga National Council of Churches (TNCC) was established in 1987. It was originally backed by all major mainline churches and reflects, respectively influenced, the changing course of ecumenism in Tonga. The ecumenical movement during the 1970’s, 1980’s, and 1990’s is considered to have been remarkably active and prospering. This is said to have its main reasons in an unusual strong commitment to ecumenism by the respective leaders at the time who managed to fill other churches with enthusiasm as well as liberating them and their members of fears and animosities regarding the other churches. Accordingly, also the work of TNCC prospered. Particularly highlighted in this aspect are regular meetings of church leaders and especially the dialogue on the BEM document which experienced huge effort and support by TNCC in that time.

Unfortunately, ecumenism ceased to flourish any further after its peak in the 1990s, and TNCC played an important role in this decline. Many interviewees highlight the fact that TNCC became openly involved in the advocacy of democracy and human rights as a “primary reason” for the apparent decrease in ecumenical spirit because not all member churches agreed with this kind of political involvement and therefore withdrew from TNCC.

The direct effects of this decline on an institutional level (the chapter deals with other perspectives at a later stage) are probably best reflected in the establishment of the Tonga Church Leaders Forum (TCLF). Unlike TNCC, TCLF focuses on social development rather than doctrinal dialogue, even including the substantially opposing Pentecostal Churches. The fact that the government even has seats in TCLF, and is therefore closely interconnected with it, is another sign of TCLF’s mere focus on development issues. Regarding this intended avoidance of matters of faith, author Aisake Casimira argues that, despite of “engaging in the development needs of the people” being “a mission mandate”, there is an indispensable need for “underlying moral principles” in order to prevent “a loss of identity and relevance”. According to Mr Casimira, this loss might eventually act contrary to original purposes because it will also apply to the people themselves and therefore deepen “people’s vulnerability to injustice and exploitation”.

The scope of field work represents the mainline churches very well but lacks voices from new religious group and the Mormon Church. There was also limited access to written documents on the history of ecumenism.

The analysis of field research has revealed the following results:

Ecumenism is broadly understood as a “biblical mandate”, a call for the churches to seek unity (based on John 17:21), which is in reality reflected by the wish for continuous dialogue on the relationship between faith and all relevant aspects of life. Despite of some minor variations, the chapter states that there is general agreement in Tonga on an understanding that includes the responsibility for fellow human beings, the environment, and thus God’s entire creation.

The chapter also assesses the present state of ecumenism. It re-emphasizes the huge extend to which ecumenism used to flourish in its early days. Ecumenism was very lively within TNCC, with frequent, regular meetings and dialogue. This spirit spread out to village level, sparking an atmosphere of frequently shared prayer and worship. As mentioned previously, this spirit lasted until the end of the 1990s when ecumenism began to lose its “visibility, vitality and influence”, one of the reasons being the political involvement of TNCC’s general secretary. The chapter emphasizes that this reflects a conflict in the Tongan context on how to sustain a healthy balance between practically oriented cooperation with the government and maintaining a “prophetic role” as voice of Christian world views and values in regards to government decisions.

The chapter also names further reasons for the decline of ecumenism.

It argues that due to the institutionalization of ecumenism, a danger of decline inevitably exists because the nature of an institution, which includes the need to acquire resources and set up of programs, requires it to put more emphasis on the pure maintenance of itself (e.g. the institution). Thus, the institution can tend to become less creative and innovative. The need of fundraising in Tonga has additionally, according to some interviewees, made the churches be more occupied with material issues instead of using the Spirit to extend their ecumenical movement. This is also closely connected to the fact that the increased focus on fundraising has also led to a stronger emphasize on development issues, which has led to a current lack of dialogue on matters of faith. This has then ultimately, as author Aisake Casimira argues, “undermined the mission mandate”. Viliame Falekaono puts this into a nutshell: “...the church no longer sees it itself as missionary but [as] institutional, and when you begin to see yourself as such, your priority is maintenance.”

The chapter emphasizes that the inclusion of dialogue on matters of faith has been a key factor for the success of ecumenism in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. This dialogue was eventually carried out by outstanding leaders whose level of vision, passion and determination has not been reached again. Especially dialogue on the BEM document is regarded as an intrinsic condition for strengthened relations and therefore also improved capacities to tackle development issues. The chapter also reemphasizes the role played by the political involvement of TNCC. Author Aisake Casimira argues that, also considering its

causes, this particular decline has resulted in an attitude towards ecumenism that is neither capable of enhancing people in matters of faith, nor is it acknowledging that ecumenism itself can be a valuable contributor in the promotion of social change.

The issues and challenges for ecumenism in Tonga derive automatically from the analysis above and could be summed up as the following:

There is a strong need for new leaders with lively vision. The theological aspect of leaders' education tends to be neglected, and the chapter indicates that the institutional structure in Tonga causes the churches to feel either too much or too little responsibility for the success of their tasks. This is because it is argued that TNCC should merely sponsor and supervise development activities whereas TCLF suffers from a lack of commitment to its work because the money is fully provided by the government.

The several social issues also depict massive challenges for the churches. There is a need to "link ecumenical dialogue and development", which is considered to be the only truly effective way for the churches to fulfill their role as stewards.

The relationship between church and state needs to be reassessed, under serious consideration of the current movement for democratic reforms. The question of how to combine ancient traditions and understandings with modern societal overall concepts needs to be raised and responded to just as well as practical and imminent problems concerning youths. Another issue is the challenge of new religious groups which are offensively trying to woo away members from the mainline churches.

Some interview partners also mention challenges at regional level, mainly concerning the ecumenical bodies PCC and PTC. Critics state that PCC is more interested in maintaining itself than in actually supporting the churches in their journey to broader and better ecumenical cooperation, and that there are management problems deriving from the fact that those in respective positions have not experienced sufficient training in management skills.

Regarding PTC, it is expressed by some interviewees that the college should put greater emphasis on training the future leaders in terms of "biblical morality and ethics, theology and administration skills" (Rev. T. Havea).

Proposals for a joint "Pacific Ecumenical" council experience support from some interviewees, mainly due to increased effectiveness, whereas other interview partners emphasize the distinct "goals, functions and membership" whose dissolution would inhibit progress rather than enhance it.

Even though the current state of ecumenism is considered to be "depressing", hope is still expressed that a turnaround might succeed. However, this will require a general renewal. This renewal could be achieved by strengthening Tongan Youth as well as approaching the previously mentioned factors of insufficient leadership and lack of dialogue on doctrinal matters. On regional level, the chapter indicates that less competition for resources in favor of better relationships could also help revive the ecumenical spirit.

The chapter concludes that even though ecumenism has remarkably declined, the "sociopolitical and economic context of Tonga" makes ecumenism more needed than ever.

The chapter indicates that the weakening of social networks by increasing freedom, reflected particularly in “consumerization” in particular, depicts the biggest social challenge for the churches. The chapter recognizes a struggle between different understandings of ecumenism that needs to be resolved.

The chapter recommends to initiate a discussion on the issues and problems elaborated and during its course. It is furthermore recommended to strengthen Tongan Youth and to “establish a platform for dialogue and collective action by member churches of both the TNCC and the TLCF on mission and development issues”. It finally recommends to institute discussions on the appropriate responses to social issues as well as possible structural renewal of the regional ecumenical movement and its bodies.

Chapter 9: Glenine, Hamlyn: Ecumenical Relations in Vanuatu: How to bridge the divides

The around 80 islands of Vanuatu are located between the Solomon Islands and Fiji. Due to several geographic features, the country is challenged in terms of infrastructure and environmental catastrophes. Additionally, social, economic and cultural spaces are changing so swiftly that the churches are considered to be existentially threatened by the challenge to face these changes.

Vanuatu, then known as the New Hebrides, has been a British-French colonial condominium from 1906 to 1960. After gaining independence, it became a parliamentary democracy. However, traditional customs are still reflected in the advisory role of the National Council of Chiefbrings as well as the pressure of parliamentary representatives to not only respond to the needs of the whole people, but the electors in their constituents in particular. The economy depends mainly on agricultural exports, but China and other Asian countries are “investing heavily” in the country. This poses the risk of growing dependence on powers from overseas. The religious landscape is dominated by the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (27,9%), the Anglican Church of Melanesia (15%), the Seventh-day Adventist Church (12,5%), the Roman Catholic Church (12,3%), and several minor (less than 5%) churches.

The chapter gives an overview about churches and ecumenism since the 1980s. It states that the ecumenical movement has been particularly strong in advocacy of Vanuatu’s independence from colonial rule but began to decline in the decade after independence. However, there is a Vanuatu Council of Churches (VCC) and an ecumenical college, Talua Ministry Training College.

Recently, there has been growing influence by civil society organizations (CSO’s) who seek partnerships with churches to tackle social issues. However, critics state that these relationships are unequal, and they also warn that growing influence of the government in these partnerships tends to undermine the churches independence.

Most interview partners express their understanding of ecumenism as one that focuses on

the importance to build a “visible unity”, a unity in the things that are done together. These things all share that they promote dialogue and relationships between denominations. They can include conversations, sharing of faith, approaches on social issues, and sharing resources.

The previously mentioned VCC is considered to be the “predominant structural expression of ecumenical relations in Vanuatu”. It experiences support in full membership or observer status by all relevant churches of Vanuatu, but not all churches are fully committed to its work. This inhibits its potential for the promotion of change intrinsically: Interviewees state that the government will only pay attention to a claim that has been raised by all churches, not only one. Additionally, many member churches seem to be struggling financially themselves which naturally affects the finances of VCC directly.

At grassroots level, most churches are engaged in local councils that are able to hold weekly meetings and seem to cooperate well. However, this is still contrasted by most churches’ fears to lose members to other churches which creates distrust and inhibits this cooperation. On regional level, VCC is part of PCC. The role of PTC is generally acknowledged and even valued very highly in terms of the difference which can be made by PTC graduates. However, the chapter strongly indicates that VCC is not always reached by all information sent by PCC. The contribution of PTC’s sub-bodies IRSA and GPP, now merged together into IMR, are also held in very high esteem among interview partners.

Regarded as successes in the ecumenical movement are all forms of practical cooperation, the different occasions in which the churches raised a shared voice (e.g. independence and nuclear testing) and various forms of formal or informal education received through local or regional schools and initiatives. Perceived failures on local level, however, include those occasions in which the churches did not raise their “prophetic voice”, a lack of purposefully created spaces for youths and women, and insufficient understanding of ecumenism beyond leadership level.

The chapter assesses four main challenges for ecumenism in Vanuatu.

First, youth unemployment and related problems. Youths are struggling to gain sufficient education and thus compete fiercely for jobs. However, they are additionally exposed to a growing dissolution of their traditional environment, being reflected for example in technology abuse and early pregnancies. Many youths try to “escape” unemployment by taking drugs, and serious alternatives to these vicious circles seldom prove to be effective.

Second, the particularly dominant problem of violence against women and related issues. Violence within families is very high (60% of women in a life-long relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner), but these cases are mostly not being talked about. Most women and men think that these matters should be settled within a family, which leads to the obvious exclusion of help from outside, e.g. the churches. There is support for commitment to gender equality, but it is also confronted with resistance by both opposing individuals and the difficulty of structurally changing society. There is

widespread belief that currently existing and future efforts need coordination by VCC. Third, there is a weakness of leadership. According to Rev. Rakau, the underlying reason for this is that the best qualified leaders mainly decide to accept offers from the government instead of going to the churches. Especially youths wish for strong leadership which guides them in their own efforts. Additionally, some of the interviewed women state that the current church leaders sometimes fail to relate to social realities on grassroots levels. Women in leadership positions are almost non-existing, even though they might contribute to rising awareness for the rights of minorities. Fourth, new religious groups and church divisions pose a serious challenge on social cohesion.

The chapter regards the current advent of “new churches, para-churches and other religious groups” in Vanuatu very critically. There is evidence that the growing fragmentation of religious affiliation causes divisions within communities or even families because the church activities which are attended by different members are not the same anymore. Strategies to address this situation include VCC’s cooperation with the government, attempts to include the new churches, and paying more attention to a church’s own youth (it is youths who are mainly attracted to the new churches). Another contributing factor are divisions arising within the VCC churches themselves: This appears to be mainly due to a small number of people who do not follow their churches advice to avoid doctrinal differences in their preaching as well as arguments over non-church related issues within a church.

Further challenges to ecumenism are mainly social issues that need to be addressed by the churches. They include many collectively organized communities’ increasing perpetuation by capitalist economic strategies, environmental issues like climate change and deep sea-bed mining, and foreign investors who in long term view threaten to undermine the traditional system of land owning and using. The chapter furthermore assesses that VCC tends to be “reluctant to criticize the government” due to their close collaboration in certain areas.

The chapter concludes that there are sufficient ideas on the favored ecumenical structure. Purpose of Vanuatu’s ecumenical structure is to provide spaces for churches to get into dialogue, unfold their potential according to all of their resources, and to form a collaborative unit that is capable to address both the government and social issues with a shared and “prophetic” voice.

However, there are no concrete suggestions on how to finance VCC accordingly.

At grassroots level, ecumenical relations are generally seen to be healthy, but understanding of ecumenism is very limited. Since church leaders also stress the importance of ecumenism, this indicates that there “is a gap” between leadership and grassroots level in the extend of their understanding of ecumenism, and the chapter suggests that this gap also includes a lack of understanding on leadership level for the needs (of women and youths in particular) at local level. This in turn obviously indicates a general lack of communication between the different levels.

The concluding chapter also sets up the question for the appropriate extend of agreeing on a

common identity. It assesses that the diversity of denominations within VCC are highly ambiguous, due to the fact that it has yet to be answered whether this still reflects a model of unity in diversity, or has already gone beyond that and rather shows a lack of common identity.

The chapter furthermore concludes that prevailing violence against women imposes a restriction to the churches' capacities because it prevents valuable resources from unfolding.

The issue should be addressed in a common approach with respect to current culture. Despite of a common view that PCC "is suffering from a lack of vision and direction", the need for "regional ecumenical presence" is generally acknowledged. A key role of this presence, currently reflected in the regional institutions SPATS as well as particularly PCC and PTC, is considered to be the provision of resources for the different pacific islands.

The chapter recommends to strengthen youths and women by increased attempts to develop more understanding of their situations as well as provision of leadership programs. VCC is encouraged to take action on land issues by initiating "measures of conflict prevention", and it is also encouraged to support research programs which are seeking for alternative biblical interpretations in regards to equality between men and women. Rev. Cliff Bird studies are highlighted as possible resource for this.

It is suggested to evaluate possible measures on a successful coexistence of doctrinally very diverse denominations.

Chapter 10: Casimira, Aisake, and Ernst, Manfred: Ecumenism in the Pacific Islands – A Stocktaking at the Beginning of the 21st Century

Part 1: The socio-economic, political and moral context

The first out of two parts of the chapter begins by providing an overview about the socio-economic, political and moral context of the pacific Islands.

Oceania in different dominating contexts

Oceania is, firstly, described as a "contested geopolitical space".

The chapter points out how different contesting powers are increasingly trying to wield influence on the Pacific in order to realize the goals of their own political and economic interests. At the same time, pacific countries, collaborating in regional institutions, have evaluated their own responses and approaches to internal and external challenges.

Based on a perceived failure of the 2004 Pacific Plan for pacific regionalism, the pacific countries provided two new approaches, the one currently more dominating in the actual policies of pacific island countries sending a strong signal of independency and self-determination, clearly connected with an orientation towards partnerships with China at the expense of western ideas of development.

However, the Pacific is not only geo-politically contested, but also exposed to growing

insecurity. The chapter assesses that the region has experienced several forms of political and ethnical violence since the 1980s. Apart from struggles going along with journeys of independency, the chapter also names several other “key factors” that are further underlying reasons for this “context of insecurity”. These key factors will be summed up in the following.

The chapter points out that the global rise of a new security policy - a policy that emphasizes perceived dangers by “weak states” that could be possibly tackled by (military) intervention - can also be applied on regional level.

However, the help provided by the “threatened” countries does not actually mitigate the underlying reasons for the national insecurity in the respective countries, e.g. poverty or other forms of inequality, but instead only serves the national interest of these powerful countries and thus even deteriorates existing problems in pacific island countries.

The chapter further states that pacific island societies are exposed to severe impacts through neo-liberalism. It is argued that the philosophical fundamentals of neo-liberalism, particularly the assumption that all aspects of human beings and the environment can and should be subordinated to their respective economic value, are currently not only clashing with, but increasingly replacing indigenous views and consequently eradicating them. The dominance of this neo-liberal world view has been made possible through the implementation of a so called – forced on by western powers– “structural adjustment policy” which was on first sight a development approach entailing privatization and austerity, but turned out to also render people’s every day social life by the dominance of the described principles.

The chapter furthermore argues that this neo-liberal world view, concretely visible in the policy of privatization and austerity, leads to a development strategy based on overall dominance of economic growth. This strategy has not only failed to hold its promise of progress for everyone, but has also led to increasing environmental (through the exploitation of resources for export on world markets) and cultural (through the described loss of indigenous views) depletion. Consequently, pacific island countries now see themselves confronted with severe problems, like poverty and health concerns, which urgently need to be addressed.

Another key factor leading to a pacific context of insecurity is the question of governance and development. The chapter recognizes a hybridization of traditional forms of governance with western-style democracies in, to different extend, all pacific island countries. This tension has contributed to social change, sometimes even ethnical conflicts.

Regarding different suggestions that aim on a solution, the chapter holds a very critical opinion towards those approaches that call for solutions through better “governance”. It is argued that these calls mainly promote a picture of passive governments which should only provide spaces for foreign investors to deploy their own economic interests. However, this approach is criticised as forcing a western way on pacific countries that is post-colonial in its assumption that the western concept of governance and development is superior and thus

fails to consider different cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, as argued previously, this development strategy of privatization and austerity has failed to address poverty.

The Pacific is also becoming more insecure due to several forms of human rights abuses. The chapter points out how Pacific islanders are exposed to political and civil rights abuses, how some countries still struggle for decolonization respectively self-determination, and particularly emphasizes the alarming extent to which “systemic” gender inequity and thus violence reaches in the Pacific. It also stresses the (indispensable) role of United Nations in the process of tackling these issues.

However, the chapter also points out how the neo-liberal capitalistic understanding of human rights undermines their implementation. It is argued that neo-liberal ideology emphasizes a right of every human being on individual choice to an extent that marginalizes things like “collective commitment, obligation and restraint”, thus serving people’s wants but not responding to their need for meaning and purpose in life. This in turn undermines several essences of Pacific culture, not only because it emphasizes individual preferences over “collective obligations”, but also because it denies the role of culture as primary influence on people’s identity. It is thus finally argued for the churches to promote human rights to be “covenantal rather than transactional” in order to unglue Pacific understandings of human rights from neo-liberal mentality.

The last key factor entailing a context of insecurity which is reflected on is the issue of climate change and environmental depletion. The chapter states that, despite of their urgency, climate change related problems are not opposed sufficiently in the Pacific. It furthermore states that an “attitude of carelessness” can also lead to internal problems, most importantly tremendous amount of wastes which are not disposed sustainably. The consequences of climate change encompass loss of biodiversity, degradation of basic resources, e.g. soils and marine resources, as well as forced resettlement.

The challenge for the churches and the theological vision as base for the analysis

The chapter considers it to be “imperative” for the Pacific as a whole as well as for the churches in their role as crucial players in civil society to act upon these challenges, not merely by adapting to the current situation with its vast influence from competing foreign powers, but by developing a “counter-narrative” that reveals alternative trajectories that consider and respect “national and regional contexts”.

In sight of the authors, this task of telling a new narrative becomes even more urgent to the churches since the increasing role of states as passive governors leaves them alone with the task to protect civil societies’ common goods. It is further argued that this becomes even more evident when considering the influence of neo-liberalism on politics, which is, through its nature of attaching economic prices without considering values or ethics, unavoidably not moral.

This trend is accompanied by various other trends which all have in common that they bring about rapid change. One of these changes is growing mobility. This marks a contrast to their original culture of constancy and crutch which in turn leave them with an uncertainty about

the very essence of their identity. This is considered to be the primary reason for the uprising of both political and religious extremism.

The chapter thus argues that developing the already postulated new, big narrative will help pacific societies find new constants in their lives to cherish and thus adapt to these changes.

The last section of the first part deals with the theological vision that underlies the whole book's analysis. This vision is based on an interpretation of the bible that seeks to oppose an imperial narrative claiming for truth to be universal and thus the interaction of world views leading to extinction of differences. Instead, it is argued that "we are at once particular *and* universal", namely universal in our nature as human beings which entails universal values like "human dignity" and "sanctity of life", but at the same time particular in our belonging to different identities. These conclusions are considered to be valid just as much for the churches, leading to a "call to the churches to explore together what it means to be a 'different' community that is united, in one Body, in its mission [...] to bring peace, justice and integrity of creation to our sea of islands".

Part 2: Challenges for ecumenism – insights from the research

The second part of the final chapter deals with "challenges for ecumenism – insights from the research". The chapter assesses that in the Pacific, there is a clearly visible rise of new religious groups at the expense of the historic mainline churches. In this context, part two will evaluate the field research being conducted for the nine country reports, after having given an overview of the global development of Christianity.

Regarding the global development of Christianity, the chapter constitutes a continuous growth of Christianity, in regards to both its percentage numbers and its plurality of denominations, ever since its emerging. Disruption of this growth was caused only by a few, historically always singular events.

However, this trend was partly reversed in the last century. Comparing the development of Christianity in different regions of the world, a slight overall decrease and a remarkable decrease in regions of the Global North has to be recognized. This is accompanied by another trend within Christianity, the "Pentecostal explosion" that also leads to a suffering of the historic mainline churches. In regards to the pacific, the chapter assesses that the rise of the Pentecostal churches (and the so called Charismatic Churches) has triggered a fierce competition between churches which works diametrical against the ecumenical movement with its vision of mutual cooperation.

Analysis of interviews and talanoa sessions

Regarding understanding of ecumenism, the authors of the chapter discern sharp difference in interviewees' perception depending on their involvement in ecumenism, level of education, and position in the church. Two main groups can be evaluated: Whereas the "laity" construes ecumenism mainly as a way for churches to work together on issues

directly affecting people's reality of life, the "educated elite" tends to refer to "Jesus' prayer for unity in the Gospel of John 17:12" which entails a "biblical mandate for the churches".

The current state of ecumenism is described as in many ways quite ambiguous. Despite of existing national councils of churches in 8/9 nations included in the field research, their impact and effectiveness is highly disputed. It is stated that cooperation within these highly important institutions is limited to joint experience of ideologically already shared events but does not extend to joint projects or even dialogue. This lack of dialogue is particularly emphasized in regards to the *Baptist, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) document, which is considered to possibly provide basic agreement on the very issues needed for successful ecumenical cooperation. Despite of remarkable ecumenical cooperation at grassroots level in some pacific islands nations, the chapter states that trend of growing diversification represents a significant impediment to collaboration between churches.

Issues and challenges for ecumenism in the pacific

Four different categories of issues and challenges are distinguished: Social problems, globalisation and rapid social change, leadership in churches and society, and financial difficulties.

Regarding the first of these categories, most frequently mentioned social problems include "domestic violence [...], teenage pregnancy, substance abuse [...], unemployment, poverty and youth suicide." Especially the first of these challenges and within this, particularly the form of domestic violence against women and children, is given a high priority by the chapter. It is also indicated that despite of a high recognition of domestic violence and teenage pregnancy as problems by interview partners, the actually affected people feel like their challenges are not recognized and acknowledged as such by their social environment, e.g. the respective societies. Rather, it appears that these topics are either not being discussed or even socially stigmatised.

Challenges related to the impact of globalisation mainly comprise "rapid social change on economies, societies, cultures and religious affiliations." There are several particular challenges which all contribute to the already mentioned context of insecurity.

The current form of development, which is based on the excessive extraction of natural resources by multinational companies, provide not only the destruction of the environment, but also wide ranging social consequences that are considered to outweigh the often marginal financial benefits by far. Only a few among many examples are land disputes, deteriorated air quality, and insufficient working conditions.

Another issue related to impacts of globalisation is climate change.

The impacts of climate change include severe destruction of environmental foundation which in turn exacerbates people's freedom and prospects to lead a healthy, secure and dignified life. Despite of undisputed high relevance for the whole region, especially low-lying regions and thus naturally the atolls of Micronesia in particular are affected by these impacts. In regards to some regions, even forced resettlement and (thus) an immense loss of

“identity and livelihood” are not really discussed in terms of *if* anymore, but in terms of *when*. The chapter assesses a lack of committed approaches to these challenges.

The third globalisation related issue taken up by the chapter is changes in religious affiliation. Interview partners frequently refer to “growing influence of new religious groups”. This entails a diversification not only of the religious landscape as a whole, but also within communities. However, this has direct impacts on how even families can perceive their relationships among each other, since the different religious identities separate different family members not only ideologically, but even cause direct splits in a family’s interactions and thus threaten social cohesion within entire villages.

Some interview partners explain the success of these new religious groups with their very direct approach to people that includes getting engaged in dialogue with them at their very own houses and supporting them with their social needs in a way that is described as “bribing” by one interview partner from Tonga. However, it is also noted that the mainline churches still struggle to find an appropriate answer to this challenge and are not seldom divided between each other themselves.

Finally, the chapter states that there is a continuous, deeply-anchored and far-reaching problem with leadership that applies to all countries being reported about in the book. These problems include ineffectiveness in terms of a reluctance to make decisions or elaborate specific strategies, which would, however, be vital for a successful approach on the previously mentioned challenges.

The issue is not limited to national churches, but includes regional bodies, PCC in particular, just as well as entities on lower levels.

Financial problems, another highly important topic that has not been solved for around 30 years now, are also not considered to be merely *connected* to leadership, but to *derive* from consistent failures of leaders to make decisions concerning finances. This has led to continuous under financing of all three regional bodies. The chapter states that a revitalisation of ecumenism can not succeed unless there is a shift in the way the churches are being led.

Successes and failures of ecumenical cooperation

This summary will begin by listing the successes of ecumenical cooperation first.

On regional level, institution of the three organisations PCC, PTC and SPATS as well as the services provided by them are widely highlighted.

Especially the unique way of coming into dialogue via PCC and also SPATS, the quality of education provided by PTC and the impact on social concerns through programs and successful campaigns implemented by GPP/IRSA and PCC are acknowledged by interview partners.

On national level, the chapter lists several forms of ecumenical cooperation. Among these, one form that seems to apply to most pacific islands countries is the shared celebration of national events, which to the author of this summary seems to indicate that the common national identity facilitates the establishment of common identities in faith.

There is furthermore very committed ecumenical cooperation in some villages. Especially very remote islands seem to particularly stand out here and are considered to be possible role models for ecumenical cooperation on further reaching levels.

However, the chapter also names several failures of ecumenical cooperation.

The authors of the chapter perceive a general discontent among many interviewees regarding the current state of ecumenism. It is indicated that this derives mainly from persisting mistrust between the mainline churches, lack of dialogue (particularly on the well-known BEM document) and ineffective National Councils of Churches (NCCs) that is partly caused by another substantial factor, the lack of visionary leadership. Leadership is considered to have such vital influence on the ecumenical movement due to the strong hierarchies within churches that require leaders to initiate programs and joint actions. Further reasons for the ineffectiveness of the NCCs are “insufficient funds, lack of commitment by member churches, mismanagement”, and no genuine willingness to step out of one’s comfort zone in order to improve ecumenical relations.

The chapter also points out that these reasons are naturally interconnected. One example for this interconnectedness is that the lack of commitment has direct effects on the financial situation of NCCs and regional bodies since these organisations depend on membership fees as means of funding, which, however, are not always paid by member churches.

Nevertheless, this lack of commitment is not single-sided, but works reciprocally with a significant number of complaints about a perceived decrease in PCC’s initiated activities and insufficient respectively decreased communication and information about them.

The chapter also emphasizes the role of overseas partners as donors. In this framework, it is stated that the heavy dependency on overseas funds does not only lead to a dependency in terms of interests from overseas that are potentially over-emphasized in comparison to pacific interests and views, but has also triggered pacific churches to become passive and reluctant to act on their own behalf. It is regarded as imperative to “move beyond” this mindset of dependency.

Despite of these external influences, the chapter also very critically assesses the internal reasons for organisational, e.g. practical, deficits, for example in terms of accountability and transparency. The chapter simultaneously mentions the dominant reluctance among many pacific islanders to submit their own culture to such a very act of self-critic.

Particularly a strong tendency to “avoid conflict at all costs” and “a culture of loyalty and obedience”, in which actions of leaders are hardly questioned, is considered to lead to a detrimental persistence of decisions or concrete programs/staff workers and leaders which/who are not contributing positively to the work of their churches but are not addressed as such due to cultural reasons.

The chapter is furthermore referring to the recently mostly in countries of Melanesia emerging partnerships with governments. Such partnerships have shown to potentially provide several truly effective programs aiming to tackle social issues, but are also criticised to endanger the churches “prophetic voice. This also poses the “very important” question

whether it should be ecumenical cooperation or development projects that provide the framework for the reverse.

Prospects for ecumenism

The chapter perceives an ambiguous atmosphere among interview partners that is composed of a pessimistic view about current ecumenical cooperation on one side, and an optimistic view on ecumenism's future on the other side.

The chapter emphasizes that when speaking about prospects and therefore the future of ecumenism, it is impossible to ignore the social-economic issues, and particularly the economic system, that are enforcing a rapid "paradigm shift" in pacific islands societies today. These challenges are described in previous parts of this summary and include the following issues: Questions of compatibility between traditional and new forms of society, rise of neo-liberalism as economic and social model, ethnic and political conflicts, problems facing youth, gender-based violence, and all forms of environmental destruction, depletion and erosion encompassed by pollution, resource extraction and climate change.

The interconnectedness of all of these issues should never be forgotten.

In order to face these challenges, the chapter emphasizes the huge potential of the church to move beyond their spiritual mission and also include "material and social" development. This potential is seen to be most visible in areas of connectedness and embedment to local contexts, "significant and valuable infrastructure", and proven capacity and therefore a distinct history in the promotion of social progress. This should, however, not hide the fact that pacific church leaders may be well prepared in mere theological aspects, but are also more and more required to acquire skills in other areas such as, among many, social analysis, management, or counselling, that will allow them to be sufficiently prepared for the vast and diverse challenges they will undoubtedly encounter during their ministry.

The chapter arrives at several main conclusions that derive from the analysis undertaken in the previous parts. Regarding the current state of ecumenism, an overall "lack of substance, commitment, direction and spiritual vision" is recognized. The most important conclusion, however, emerges from the challenges concerning social issues. Despite of a perceived very high importance for the churches to fulfil their role as prophetic voice in the fight for sustainable solutions, the chapter finds them ill equipped to do so. This is seen to be caused by a theology that has not changed according to new and rapid challenges, but in reverse is considered to still cherish outdated ideas and models. Therefore it is imperative for the churches to develop a theological analysis that considers and responds to social realities.

The churches are invited to collectively create an accentuated Christian vision that meets the potential of the churches role as players in civil society.

The chapter proposes the following recommendations, directed to all decision-makers on all levels with influence on ecumenism. It should be noted that these recommendations can not make up for intense study of the recommendations in the individual country reports.

The chapter recommends the pacific churches to create awareness for the influence of historical and socio-economic trends on both pacific societies and the churches themselves,

followed by a review of their self-understanding with regards to their political efficacy. It is further recommended to equip leaders with skills in key areas beyond theology as well as capacities to overcome currently normal corruption, to always open up for ecumenical cooperation if common interests exist and to always put the vulnerable, voiceless and marginalised, with special consideration for women and youths, at the centre of their agendas.

This summary can not give readers the same depth and detail provided by the original chapter, but has aimed to reflect the authors' views in the best way possible.

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