



Myndigheten för  
samhällsskydd  
och beredskap

# The Art of Risk

Understanding Representations of Risk in  
the Pacific and Caribbean Islands



Research Project: *The Art of Risk: Understanding the role of aesthetics for disaster mitigation*

2015-2017

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this project is to offer an explanation for the limited impact of international resilience programmes in local communities. International financial investment in reducing risk has grown significantly over the last decade, giving rise to a large number of programmes designed to increase resilience in developing countries. Yet studies and reports continue to reveal inconsistencies and limitations in the local implementation of such programmes. One reason for this lack of reception is a mismatch in the conceptualisations of risk at the global and local level. This important and under researched explanation is explored in this study by examining risk perceptions in the Pacific and the Caribbean islands through local forms of art. This raises awareness of alternative worldviews on resilience and provides the grounds for encouraging a more refined and equitable programmes on resilience in the future.

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Bild: Uili Lousi, 2016, Dancing Fish In Motion. Acrylic on Tongan Tapa canvas, 40" x 40"

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Författaren är ensam ansvarig för rapportens innehåll.

## Forward

This report summarizes the results of the *Art of Risk*, a research project funded by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) that builds on a previous MSB research project *Glocal disaster risk management: A study on how global principles on disaster risk management can be effectively translated into local contexts*. The main aim of this project is to understand how the international community can effectively promote resilience through disaster risk reduction programmes in developing states. This objective is to answer the question: what can explain the limited influence of international Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programmes in local settings? An answer offered in this study is to encourage the international community to increase their awareness of specific worldviews that constitute local risk perceptions. The focus of this research programme is thus to investigate ‘worlds of resilience’ in two highly vulnerable regions in the world: the Pacific and the Caribbean islands. These two regions collectively represent 44 islands states that face similar environmental threats, yet are composed of different risk perceptions. This provides for a useful comparison to understand how culturally defined risk perceptions determine the extent to which international programmes on resilience are received. The use of local art forms such as poetry, music and dance have been used to understand local worldviews in addition to extensive interviews with disaster practitioners, local chiefs, diplomats, ambassadors, international organizations, regional organizations, financial institutions, and NGOs. It has been a rewarding process for myself personally and also academically.

I wish to thank Ulrika Postgård from MSB for her belief in my project and support throughout the last two years. The generous MSB funding that has made this project possible is highly valued. During my time researching, I was able to build on previous research conducted in the Caribbean and the Pacific through a research trip to the Kingdom of Tonga. I would like to thank all of those who agreed to answer my many questions in Nuku'alofa and for your warm and unforgettable hospitality. Lastly, I would like to thank my wife and three children for allowing me to conduct research in faraway places and for their unconditional support and love, and for their friendship

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## Summary

How can the international community be more effective in translating global prescriptions on disaster risk reduction to individual communities? This report examines why states, international organizations, financial institutions and regional organizations have had limited success in supporting resilient practices in local communities. Through a comparison of the Caribbean and the Pacific islands, this study highlights a broad array of natural hazards and social determinants of risk that create high levels of vulnerability. Much of this risk is heavily related to development issues on poverty, land management and urbanization. However, it is argued that these larger structural issues cannot be successfully addressed until cultural particularities are taken seriously. That is, the importance of cultural perceptions of risk. It is only when these are better understood that more efficient policy prescriptions can be made, and support given, that larger development issues can assume a different hue and be tackled more effectively. The promotion of the creative arts is suggested as an important method for enhancing the value and stability of communities, which translates into a more resilient future.

# 1. Worldviews of Resilience

## 1.1 Introduction

Over the last two decades, the international community has established an agenda that aims to reduce disaster risk at the individual, domestic and international levels of governance. One of the most significant events for raising global awareness on risk reduction was the second world conference in Hyogo, Japan, convened only a few months after the 2004 Southeast Asia Tsunami. The result of this conference was the Hyogo Framework Programme for Action (HFA) that provides a blueprint for organizations and states to promote knowledge and good practices on risk reduction, with an emphasis on ex-ante risk solutions rather than reactive mis/management. Since 2015 the Sendai Framework programme provides a continuation of this theme albeit with a stronger emphasise on the importance of resilience (UN, 2015). Organizations that have taken up this global mantel include but are not limited to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the International Federation of Red Cross Societies (IFRC), the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction (GFDRR) and the European Union (EU).

Yet the ability of the international community to translate global aims on disaster reduction into local knowledge has been idiosyncratic and limited (Gaillard & Mercer, 2013; Wisner, Gaillard & Kelman, 2012, p. 25). This is most clearly seen in developing states such as Haiti and Vanuatu that do not have the capacity to manage and mitigate large-scale disasters (GNDR, 2011; Munro 2013); and it reflects the general difficulty of implementing global development agendas at the local level. Why, then, is the efficacy of international DRR programmes rarely fulfilled if investing in a resilient state ought to produce economic, social and political benefits?

One explanation explored in this study examines the extent to which a global rationality of risk is conducive to local pre-existing rationalities of risk in the Pacific and the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> Based on the theoretically-informed assumption that local reception on the global distribution of resilience is determined by a pre-existing set of cultural expressions (Acharya 2004), this paper examines Pacific and Caribbean receptiveness or resistance to resilience.

Informed through interviews conducted in the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles (Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Grenada & St. Lucia), Polynesia (Samoa & Tonga) and Melanesia (Fiji & Vanuatu) as well as commentaries, and analyses on Pacific and Caribbean art forms, the following pages consider how the Pacific and Caribbean receive and resist external messages of resilience. This begins with a description on the global diffusion of resilience via the advocacy on DRR and discusses reasons offered for the global-local implementation gap (section

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<sup>1</sup> By 'Rationality' I mean the way in which a 'variety of meanings (ways) in which things can be said to be, exist' (Angeles 1992, cited in Henke 1997, p.40).

2). This is followed by an analysis of Pacific and Caribbean perspectives of risk as reflected through interviews and various art forms (section 3). The fourth section compares the regions and examines the role of art in promoting and contesting global visions of resilience. The study concludes with a reflection on the role of art in reconstructing resilience and identities in island states and beyond.

### 1.1.1 Research Design

The approach of this study remains modest. It does not provide an in-depth ethnographic study on the inter-relationship between art, globalization and local identity construction. Nor does it extrapolate in detail the interaction between global and local norms on resilience. Instead, it contrasts global and local understandings of insecurity and vulnerability as a means to: (1) understand the potential scope on the global advocacy of resilience at the local level; and (2) to draw out the distinct rationalities of risk to afford better understandings of different ‘worlds of resilience’. This is achieved through the application of localization theory.

Norm localization (Acharya 2004) provides a useful framework for understanding (i) why some transnational norms are (un)successfully adapted to existing local practices; and (ii) accounts for variation in the role external ideas have on institutional change (Acharya, 2004). It makes the argument that the diffusion of ideas from transnational norm entrepreneurs will always be met by a set of pre-existing local norms, cultures and practices. The main function of this theory is to help us understand the interaction between foreign ideas and local norms, and how to explain the possible outcomes of norm resistance, localization or displacement.

<i>Theorized Ideal Type</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Aesthetic Ideal Type II</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Aesthetic Ideal Type III</i>
Diffusion will always be met by pre-existing local norms	What features typify Caribbean identities in relation to risk?	Ideational complexity; fluidity; nothingness; meaninglessness	Caribbean identities typified as ephemeral	Can Caribbean identity be typified as ephemeral?	Creolization as a source of creativity provides means for re-imagining the self	Caribbean identities typified as creative

**Table 1.1 A dialogic examination on the diffusion of DRR: an example from case of the Caribbean**

This theoretical assumption provides a starting point in a dialogic examination on the diffusion of DRR in the Pacific and the Caribbean. This begins with the formulation of an ideal type as an abstraction from reality for the purpose of specification (see Weber, 1949/2010, p. 43), rather than generalization (see also Jackson, 2011, pp.144-5). As depicted in Table 1. 1, a question is formulated from an ideal typification of Acharya’s theory, which is then assessed empirically by ‘talking’ to texts and interviewees. While some might see the answers that



emerge from this exercise as the outcome, a dialogic approach perceives this as the end of the beginning where continual collaboration between ideal types and empirics can afford us greater insight. An aesthetic ideal type is thus constructed, which is again submitted to an empirical analysis whereby a conversation between the subject and object – and the ambiguity this generates – can lead to further insight. The far-right column represents a second aesthetic ideal type, which is the ‘current’ ideal type, produced through a dialogic examination. This process is applied to the analysis in chapter 3.

### *Method*

The main method for collecting empirical data is through extensive interviews with global and local practitioners involved in DRR. Based on initial theorized ideal types, semi-formal, face-to-face interviews (a list of questions are asked where freedom to engage in other topics and questions is permitted) were conducted in the Caribbean and Pacific regions in 2014 and 2017. A research diary was also kept, which included observations made about interviews, the environmental surroundings and cultural experiences. In order to ‘triangulate’ the information gained from the interviews, secondary and primary resources – books, framework agreements, minutes, etc. – were used to substantiate emerging concepts. The method of comparison between island countries and between regions is also used to create important contrast and add to our knowledge of risk and vulnerability.

Furthermore, artistic productions such as poetry, prose and paintings from the two regions are used to further our understanding of how risk and resilience is understood within the Pacific and the Caribbean. Art has been and continues to provide a central mode of self-discovery for the Pacific and Caribbean region as well as a bulwark against the history and zeitgeist of colonialism (see for instance for the Caribbean see Braithwaite, 1999; Césaire, [1956] 2013; Fanon, [1967] 2013, Glissant, 2010; Lamming, 1983; Walcott, 1998; for the Pacific see: Hau’ofa, 1983; 2008; Pule, 1985; 1986; 1992; Wendt, 1980; Tamu, 2014). A focus on art forms such as poetry, painting and music provides a tangible set of cultural expressions that *re-present* identities through the narration of stories. If artists ‘occupy a place in the social order that is essential for the system to be able to look at itself’ (Cuahtémoc Medina, as cited in Thornton, 2014, p. 168) then art has an important role in shaping and reshaping identities that in turn inform perceptions of risk.

## 2. The Global-Local Implementation Gap

Global attempts to implement resilience have been inconsistent and limited (Heijmans, 2009; Matyas & Pelling, 2014, p.52). As briefly illustrated, the international community has become very active in its attempts to increase the resilience of individuals, local communities, cities, states and organizations. Yet existing research tends to suggest that while a lot of investment has been channelled into DRR programmes, the overall success in terms of risk reduction is limited. A persistent gap remains between global policy prescriptions on disaster reduction and national practices and between national commitments and local outcomes (Hollis, 2012; 2014; GNDR, 2013, p.2; see also Comfort et al., 1999, p.43; Haver & Foley, 2011, p.17; Kirton, 2013, p.4-5; Wisner, Gaillard & Kelman, 2012, p.25). This can be understood as a discrepancy within global risk governance, where the responsibility to manage disaster risk weighs heavily on the international community and much less on those that are impacted by disasters: local communities and individuals. The international community increasingly finances risk reduction programs and promotes 'good practices' at the national and local levels, yet many municipalities, state organs and individuals appear to fail to take full ownership of their responsibility to manage disasters. At least, from the perspective of some international organisations. According to a report published by the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR), change in local practices has been fairly insignificant particularly in developing countries and countries most at risk to natural hazards (GNDR 2011, p. 31).

The gap between international commitments and local outcomes has not been lost on experts and students of disaster studies, who have provided a number of explanations for the lack of implementation. These explanations predominantly focus on issues of global and national governance.

The manner in which the global governance of resilience programmes are managed can affect the extent to which implementation becomes a reality. This can include the need to clarify terminology found in global framework agreements such as the Sendai Framework (Aitsi-Selmi, Blanchard & Murray, 2015), donor priorities and the design of resilient-based projects (Gaillard & Mercer, 2013). Perhaps the most conspicuous issue facing effective implementation at this level of analysis is the tendency to finance short-term, result-based programmes. A continual focus on event-driven financing, where a large majority of international development aid is funnelled into disaster response and recovery rather than long-term resilience and mitigation (Kellet & Caravani, 2013) means that critical capacity support rarely trickles down to the community level, where it is needed the most.

An equally important issue of global governance is global responsibility. If international organizations and states take seriously their commitment to the Sendai Framework, then it has a responsibility to tackle the ‘underlying disaster risk drivers’ (UN, 2015, p.10) which include poverty, corruption and cultural, gender and political discrimination (Alexander & Davis, 2012, p.2). Not all of these are fully cognized in the Sendai framework and accordingly fade out of focus when attempting to implement disaster resilience practices in and within states. Perhaps part of the problem lies in the global formulations on resilience that have to be translated into realizable goals at the local level: ‘the lofty aspirations enshrined in current policy discourses must be realized on the ground’ (Tierney, 2013, p.xvi).

Weak national governance tends to be one of the most cited reasons for the lack of resilience and limited implementation. This is often related to a lack of political will, institutional design and capacity, leadership, trust and limited accountability, coordination and communication between national and municipal or community-based institutions (Ahrens & Rudolph, 2006; Djalante, Thomalla, Sabaruddin & Carnegie, 2012; Gailard & Mercer, 2013; Hamdan, 2015; May & Williams, 1986; Matayas & Pelling, 2014; Sureshwaren, 2013; van Niekerk, 2014; Wamsler, 2006; Zia & Wagner, 2015). The very nature of disaster resilience – conceived in anticipatory, responsive or adaptive terms – means that investment in a policy space, where success is defined by the lack of evidence (that a disaster is effectively mitigated), is going to be difficult (Gailard & Mercer, 2012). Trade-offs between competing policy issues is inevitable, which underlines the importance of policy framing, agenda setting, donor support and international pressure. When national and local governing institutions lack basic resources and capacities, the political-opportunity cost between issue areas becomes even more acute.

While governance issues have provided some useful answers to implementation issues of resilience, other explanations that focus on the reception of knowledge has begun to emerge. These explanations emphasise the importance of social capital and learning.

Civil society networks have been identified as an important precondition for proliferating knowledge on disaster resilience within and between communities, as well as building social capital (see Djalante et al., 2012; Schelfaut et al., 2011; Zia & Wagner 2015). Like resilience, the notion of social capital has had a significant impact on development strategies, and its meaning is also contested (Harris & De Renzio, 1997). In its original conception, social capital refers to a form of capital that is produced through family and community interaction (see Coleman, 1988). This meaning was adopted by Robert Putnam to mean ‘features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’ (1993). The basic argument is that social capital is the ‘missing link’ or necessary condition for effective government and economic development (Putnam, 1993). Thus, the absence of social capital will mean weak lines of communication and limited trust, which will impede attempts to implement resilience programmes at the community

level. Social capital is consequently seen as essential for community resilience (Etkin 2015, p.131). Lack of social capital, one would assume, means that knowledge on resilience practices will not be readily diffused and accepted.

The spread of knowledge on 'how to be resilient' not only requires social capital, but also the ability to learn and reflect, which is often mentioned as an important aspect of community resilience (Castleden et al., 2011; Djalante et al., 2012; Gaillard & Mercer, 2012; Pelling, 2011). Of crucial importance for this field is: (1) what is learned; (2) whether the learning results in changes of practice; and (3) how participants can be motivated to learn. It is not clear whether these specific issues have been fully addressed in the literature. Most attention has focused on what is learned, with particular attention to the difficulties of combining global scientific knowledge with local indigenous knowledge (Gaillard, 2007; Gaillard & Mercer, 2012; Mercer, Dominey-Howes, Kelman & Lloyd, 2007; Mercer, Kelman, Taranis & Suchet-Pearson, 2010; Shaw, 2012; Shaw, Sharma & Takeuchi, 2009; Shaw & Uzumi, 2014).

## **2.1 Toward an understanding of representations of risk**

The explanation offered in this study builds on the idea of learning and social capital by arguing that the very ability to learn is conditioned by pre-existing representations of risk. This alternative and under-explored explanation emerged through an inductive process of data collection where the importance of culture and perceptions of risk were highlighted in local representations of risk. While the topic of culture and risk is not new in disaster risk studies (see for instance, Adams, 1994; Pidgeon, Kasperson & Slovic, 2003; Slovic 2000; 2010; Wildavsky, 1988) an analysis on ideational representations – as represented through local art forms – as a method for understanding risk perceptions is a fairly unique approach to allow greater insight into the reception on the global advocacy of disaster risk reduction and resilience. The following chapter examines Pacific and Caribbean understandings of risk through this approach.

## 3. Local Representations of Risk

Caribbean and Pacific states' experience similar natural hazards and share similar vulnerabilities. Hurricanes, earthquakes, seawater rising and droughts pervade each region along with limited economic possibilities and similar logistical issues. However, one major difference in both regions is how societies perceive risk: a difference attributed to vastly different historical experiences. The following section describes the desperate cultural practices that typify the Caribbean and the Pacific in terms of how they produce different risk perceptions. The section on the Pacific focuses on how some changes in indigenous practices results in a greater dependence on national and international support; the effects of globalization on Pacific communities has led to some instances of a 'culture of reliance' rather than a 'culture of resilience'. Yet there also remains a strong influence of tradition and history in defining a particular Pacific epistemology in terms of a temporal perception of risk. The section on the Caribbean illustrates how narratives are constantly negotiated through various art forms, reflecting and constituting a particular approach to resilience. Unlike the Pacific ideal type, which looks to the past, the Caribbean ideal type is more concerned with embracing the present which has important ramifications for how ideas on risk and resilience are received and internalized.

### 3.1 The Pacific

The Pacific region is home to some of the most vulnerable states in the world. These island states are threatened by a large swath of natural hazards including landslides, storms, floods, volcanic activity, earthquakes, epidemics and droughts that often reverberate through the political, social and economic systems of developing states in the region. While the threats from natural hazards are real, and the added value of improving the capacities of states and individuals through the promotion of DRR is rarely disputed, many of these islands states remain highly vulnerable.

As a starting point for analysing the theoretical ideal type – 'diffusion will always be met by pre-existing local norms' – Epele Hau'ofa provides a useful characterization of the predominant indigenous values that structure many cultures in the Pacific. Some of the main features include: caring for the elderly and disabled in the absence of modern social welfare systems; the concept of reciprocity and social unity; the interests of the community over individuals; the sharing of goods and services; self-sufficiency, including subsistence farming; and the integration of the arts into community practices. Using Hau'ofa's system of values as a standard, two types of representations are discussed in relation to the (perceivable) internalization of knowledge on DRR: (1) change in traditional

practices on resilience and (2) weakening persistence in temporal perceptions of risk.

### **3.1.1 Local Resilience**

Traditionally, societies in the Pacific have been highly resilient to disasters. Long before the modern concept of humanitarian relief aid, villagers devised resilient practices to cope with rude interruptions to everyday life. Preserving breadfruit underground, using medicinal properties from local trees and fauna, ensuring additional root crops, community cooperation, and constructing wind-resilient houses (such as the Fijian bure and Samoan fale) that can be re-constructed within a week, diversifying basic resources through inter-village and inter-island trade, have been common activities practices performed by local communities across the Pacific.

This is changing. In many parts of the Pacific – particularly in less isolated and increasing urban areas such as Port Vila, Suva, Apia and Nuku'alofa – people are now less willing to bury breadfruit or rebuild damaged houses. Instead, they wait for food packages and government payouts. Tarpaulins are set up in place of damaged housing where the occupants will wait for assistance. The involvement of the immediate community in rebuilding traditional housing is eroding; the traditional norm of reciprocity is fading.

The blame for change has been placed on the global economy, poverty and migration, colonial subjection and post-colonial interference. It can be argued that a sense of community and place is being worn away and replaced by individualism and a consumer-orientated society. Capitalism and urbanization are reshaping societies, pulling the workforce and educated away from villages to urban areas and overseas. Nuclear families are replacing village communities as the primary social unit and subsistence farming is being replaced by cash crops. Many of these changes in behaviour have a direct impact on the level of risk. Reduced sharing, the atomization of community, less self-reliance, and urbanization contribute to increases in vulnerability.

This erosion of indigenous knowledge and subsequent increase in vulnerability is by no means a homogenous process. The Pacific contains a diverse set of distinct cultures and hence different perceptions on, and capacities to manage, risk. While it would seem that risk tends to coalesce around sites of closer connectivity to the global through urbanization and technology, this does not mean that isolated islands are more resilient and better able to manage major disasters. The impact of cyclone Zoë on the isolated Tikopia and Anuta islands in 2002 (situated in the eastern province of Temotu, Solomon Islands), for instance, clearly overwhelmed traditional settlement, housing and agricultural practices. Amalgamated solutions are needed that provide hybrid forms of traditional and global knowledge on disaster risk. This, it is argued in the next section, is more likely to succeed when a more equitable and balance dialogue can be made between the local and the global.

The introduction of specific technologies, such as weather prediction and desalinization plants is a good example of such hybrid forms of knowledge that can produce various outcomes. This is testified with great affect on reflections on the galu afi (tsunami or ‘wave of fire’) that met the shores of Samoa in 2009:

...back then we didn't need the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center to tell us a tsunami was coming. We didn't wait for a cell phone text to make us evacuate to higher ground. A hundred years ago, grandparents told their children stories about 'galu afi'. About what they should do...

Wendt Young 2010, pp.372-3

While some Samoans may remember through active oral histories, the practice of remembering stories of Tsunamis are not always reified and are sometimes forgotten. This was the case for the oral history of Tsunamis in the Solomon Islands village of Tapurai where even the original word for Tsunami (sage kolo) was not widely used. Without careful planning toward hybrid futures, resilience achieved through remembering may be replaced by reliance achieved through technology.

An additional contributor to changing perceptions of risk is the response efforts made by modern humanitarianism. Timely interventions by states, NGOs and international organizations in the immediate aftermath of a disaster can reify a growing sense of expectancy that contributes to long-term vulnerability. Shadrack Welegtabit, the director for disaster management in Vanuatu, understands this. Noting a week before Cyclone Pam hit, Welegtabit said that he is averse to sending relief supplies to villages unless it is absolutely necessary in an effort to discourage dependency. It is questionable whether the international community fully understands this. Inter-agency competition can get in the way of long-term development strategies that aim to decrease dependencies on international aid. Inadvertent change in the behaviour of communities produced by a reactive rather than a proactive international system creates the risk of a self-perpetuating cyclical system where the recipient and the donor become interdependent.

It is easy to see that national politics can also fall into this trap. Depending on the international community to provide what the state ought to provide means that limited government budgets do not need to prioritize risk reduction. If this makes it hard to sell risk reduction to the state, political expediency makes it even harder. It is difficult to convince government officials to invest in preventing and preparing for future contingencies when it is highly likely to occur after their incumbency or even lifetime. For some, it is better to be seen assisting in the aftermath of a flood than claiming praise for implementing risk reduction policies that successfully mitigated the risk.

In summary, global forces such as technology, the market economy and unchecked humanitarianism tend to encourage individualism, a reliance on external actors, political expediency and create institutional gaps. This, in turn, is changing collective representations on risk. Indigenous practices on resilience are giving way to a culture of expectation.

### 3.1.2 Temporal Perceptions of Risk

While some traditional practices may be eroding other features of Hau'ofa's value system remain more intact. A number of indigenous values and corresponding worldviews have not been completely lost to the structural affects of globalization. In reaction to migration and neo-colonial suppression by the West, such as education programmes and development projects, prominent scholars and artists have promoted an oceanic way-of-life that has seen greater attempts to reassert indigenous epistemologies. Teaching long distance navigation techniques, tattoo, and promoting cultural studies at school are some examples that have risen in prominence. The mind-set of the Oceanic people has not dramatically altered. Local solutions to problems produced by a globalized world are possible and are happening. For many Oceanic people indigenous values represent an unconscious structure of daily life.

So how does Oceanic epistemology relate to risk? It is argued that a Pacific non-linear concept of time, central to an Oceanic epistemology, limits the internalization of DRR (as prescriptions that hold a Western linear concept of time). Like the Niuean use of gestures, language, story telling and dance, an Oceanic epistemology relies on a 'non-linear, culturally-embedded, circular, spiritual way of thinking, theorizing and communicating'. For example, there no word in iTaukei (indigenous Fijian) for future. Instead, future is understood through the idea of 'Sautu', meaning peace and harmony. In order to achieve Sautu one ought to look back to the past in order to secure a peaceful future. This ought to focus attention on iTaukei values, such as mutual respect (Veivakarokorokotaki) and caring (Veilomani/Veikauaitaki) and honouring a sense of community (Veidokai). Similar notions are also presented in other Pacific states. For instance, the concept of varivagana – which refers to a sense of community, love, reciprocity and generosity – remains a staple norm for many societies in the Solomon Islands. Similarly, the Polynesian islands of Samoa understand the achievement of health through a balanced relationship between God (Atua), people (Tagata) and the land (Lauvanua).

This stark focus on relationships reflects the emphasis most Pacific island cultures place on genealogy in their social construction of time, history and (hence) identity. This means that the past and the future is orientated towards familial relations: time is not a static abstraction but malleable, spiritual and symbolic.

An Oceanic understanding of time contrasts sharply to a linear European epistemology that 'thinks in the future'. Western values of individuality, rationality, progress and responsibility are set within a linear dimension of time. It is easy to see this temporal orientation in the promotion of DRR by the international (and largely Western) community. For example, priority 3 of the post-2015 Sendai framework agreement – as well as general global rhetoric on DRR – places great emphasis on the need to invest in the future.

We are thus confronted with two disparate epistemologies on time. One looks back to the future, the other turns its back to the past to see the future. It is



postulated that these different conceptions on time can affect, and in this case limit, the extent to which preparing for future contingent events becomes internalized by local communities. Thinking in the future is thus restricted by (1) a focus on reifying community reciprocity through *satu* or (2) negotiating the social and economic uncertainties produced by a gaze toward the global; for some, the ‘contradictions exhibited by modernity far surpass the threat of large-scale ecological disturbances’. In both cases temporal perceptions of risk are either focused on the past or on the present. The future does to appear to be a central concern. If this is true, then the international community need to be more conscious about how they can support DRR practices in local communities that aim to combine western and indigenous thought at a deeper and more meaningful level to facilitate the internalization of DRR.

### **3.2 Art, Resilience and Identity Formation in the Caribbean**

The role of various forms of art, such as music, poetry, prose, painting, dance, sculpture, mask-making and visual performances, can be and are used as sources of creativity that can re-construct common narratives and establish myths. Art provides a valuable medium for constructing and deconstructing alternative worlds. In a global era where people are taught to be resilient – that is, perpetually learning to live with anxiety and vulnerability as the new liberal order (Reid, 2012) – art provides a creative path that can reify existing rationalities on resilience, provide a bulwark against external ideas on resilience, or establish an alternative political imaginary: ‘aesthetical qualities may have both an affirmative and resistive potential to challenge dogmatic images of thought’ (Evan & Reid, 2014, p.171; Grove & Adey, 2015). The following section examines how some Caribbean artists and intellectuals reify or invent traditions by (re)constructing various narratives. This provides a glimpse into Caribbean identity formation and how this informs local understandings of resilience.

Kamua Brathwaite and other literary figures, such as Frantz Fanon, are very aware of the creative power of the aesthetic in shaping identity through reflecting on the self and on the other (Hall, 2001, p.26). Brathwaite’s description of Caribbean psychology as ‘tidalectic’ – like the ocean that comes from one continent and ‘touches’ another – attempts to invent a common story or myth by weaving a distant connection with Africa into the present. However, this is a connection that also recedes the shores of the Caribbean islands ‘into a creative chaos of the(ir) future’ (Brathwaite, 1999, p.34). This African connection has been popularized and reified through the Harlem Renaissance, Aime Cesaire’s notion of ‘negritude’ (Hall, 2001, p.33), Haitian Voodoo and Rastafarianism.

Slavery, indentureship and colonial rule have clearly applied layers of historical experiences that provide difficult grounds for establishing a common story and, hence, a cohesive and strong self-identity. Claiming any verifiable links to Carib or Tainos cultures is also difficult considering the limited amount of indigenous representation left on most islands. A difficult past and a present-day mixture of

beliefs and ethnicities, combined with relatively newly claimed independence, represent some important features that affect the ability of communities to ground their customs in a historically defined script. This has led to a sense of emptiness or fleetingness expressed well in one of Derek Walcott's poems entitled *Air*, which end with the phrase: 'there is too much nothing here' (1969/2007, pp. 52-3).

Unlike some commentators who look to the past for ideational roots, Walcott appears to be more pessimistic – or pragmatic – about the past. An awkward association with history means that there is often less enthusiasm to preserve the past: to preserve a common story that creates community identity (see Walcott, 1974).

The idea of 'nothingness' is related to the notion of 'meaninglessness' in terms of an apparent lack of appreciation for art (Arlen, 2013). Sculptures, historical artefacts and buildings, for example, become eroded and are not maintained because no meaning is placed on the object. No connection is being made on how artistic works can provide a medium for ideational cohesiveness. In the words of a local Trinidadian artist: 'all this art means nothing if the people are illiterate, both the doctor and the labourer are illiterate in our society, both the businessman and the gardener, both the stock broker and the janitor are illiterate to the value of beauty and to their meaningfulness' (Arlen, 2013). This is expressed well in one of his art pieces (see Figure 1.0) that seems to question the meaning of the noisy neoliberal distractions – lust, power, competition, individualism, financial pursuits (see Thornton, 2014, p. 99) – that society embrace. Perhaps an embrace that folds into a 'throw-away' culture that amplifies both a culture of non-maintenance and non-preservation.



**Figure 1.0** Excerpt from the Paint Installation Project Series - The Kings and their Planes. Dean Arlen, 2013. 60" x 80" Acrylic, Paper, Graphite, Spray Paint, Glue

If the concepts of 'fluidity', 'nothingness' and 'meaningless' describe Caribbean identity as ephemeral, then it would seem difficult to encourage a sense of stability through tradition. Yet, even if the Caribbean may 'know all about nothing' (Walcott 1974, p.12), it does not nullify approaches for constructing identity, particularly if one looks to the future rather than the past. This is what Walcott advocates (1974, p.13) by referring to the use of the rich and diverse culture of the Caribbean as a source of creativity and innovation that can contribute to the invention of tradition (see also Césaire, [1956] 2013 p.39; Hall, 2001, p.37; Harris, 1999; Walcott, 1998).

A good example of constructing identity through the creative and creolized societies is the various music genres that have emerged in the region, such as

Calypso, Soca, Parang and Chutney. Hall (2001), for instance, takes the example of Reggae as an invention of the 1960s that came out of Ska, a related music genre that blends Caribbean calypso with American jazz. In other words, reggae was a product of the assimilation of external and internal music cultures. While many of the lyrics reminisce about a symbolic Africa (Bob Marley's *Buffalo Soldier*) or being free from the bonds of slavery and (neo)colonial oppression (Jimmy Cliff's *The Harder They Come*), the musical genre does not originate from Africa, but is primarily a product and outcome of the creative diversity of the Caribbean.

The acculturation of various African and European cultures, languages and beliefs produced a complex assortment of contingent norms and customs. Much of this adaptation, or creolization, was formed out of the need to survive, the creative use of being placed in a new environment and the effects of oppression (Morgan, 2011, p.251): the 'mangled pasts' of the Caribbean people were formed through the 'creative genius of the users, moulding older cultural substances into new and unfamiliar patterns, without regard for "purity" or "pedigree"' (Mintz, 1970, as cited in Morgan, 2011, p.251). In other words, the Caribbean peoples were forced to be resilient in terms of adapting to survive. However, unlike the postmodern concept of resilience, this did not entail the consent to an ontology of suffering, but the use of creativity born out of survival as a source of renewal and as a root for inventing tradition.

A plan to establish an interactive children playground in the Tacarigua district of Trinidad is a pertinent example of using art as a source of liberation through creativity. Here, the past and future are combined with a search for a 'modern identity'. This is illustrated in a description of the playground: '[It] is the recognition of the historical realities of space, people, architecture, and the objects' new desirability in achieving harmony in communal spaces. To achieve this theoretical understanding, will mean exploring our communities past...which in turn can create greater opportunities in healing spaces with traumatic histories, spaces at risk, spaces looking to capitalize on its rich stories...' (Anon, n.d, p.15).

## 4. Resilient Futures

The previous section outlined different perceptions of risk, which were the result of unique and dramatic historical episodes. The Caribbean ideal type expresses a sense of ephemerality; the Pacific idea type expresses a dislocation of indigenous practices that contribute to modern challenges of internalizing ideas on DRR. An examination of these different worldviews reveal different perceptions of risk and specific mind-sets that can limit the extent to which global ideas on DRR can be internalized. The idea associated with an ephemeral state-of-being in the Caribbean, for example, can encourage a sense of complacency as the concept of preservation and preparedness are not strong societal values. Similarly, an increasing sense of expectancy from international assistance encourages a sense of complacency in terms of future contingent events in the Pacific. Indigenous concepts of time, as well as traditional village customs, may also prevent the internalization of risk reduction. A Western/global conceptualization of resilience as ‘investment in the future’ is met with a very different conceptualization of the future in both the Caribbean and the Pacific. So, what is to be done?

### 4.1 The value of self-worth

The promotion of societal self-worth, through tailored cultural management practices, is proposed as a long-term solution to aid in the re-organization of society towards achieving greater resilience. Societal self-worth is understood as the collective self-worth of individuals that live in a ‘community of...shared customs, laws, and organizations’ (Oxford Dictionary 2014). Self-worth is understood here as a keystone for establishing a resilient society by forging and reifying a common identity that has the effect of modifying temporal perceptions of risk: from short-term thinking to a holistic understanding of risk that takes pride in the past and preserves the present for the future. Based on the above analysis, cultural management would be applied differently in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

For the Caribbean, careful cultural management can help form societal self-worth by encouraging a *common story* out of the multiplicity and diversity that has emerged out of a turbulent Caribbean past. Studies have shown, for example, that investment in tangible (public places, museums, libraries) and intangible (rituals, festivities, carnival) heritage sites can produce increased level of social trust, common values, a ‘sense of place, local pride and sense of belonging’ (Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek, 2013, p. 47). Banking on the inherent and dynamic creativity of the Caribbean, and through the effective management and channelling of this creativity, a greater sense of self-worth among peoples can be achieved. This would encourage a desire to pass on this creativity, and the sense of community it creates, to the next generation. Slowly, the past could reshape the ideational status quo leading to a greater appreciation for a more secure and less vulnerable environment in the future: a shift from ephemerality to a sense of cultural and ideational permanence.

For the Pacific, cultural management would encourage the careful merging of indigenous and western ideas. This would be a positive step forward. However, it is also important to understand how *knowledge* is translated and internalized into effective *practice*. This requires a better understanding of the cultural perceptions of risk that typify much of the Pacific. There is well-founded scepticism that another workshop or another visit to a village is not going to change behaviour. Long-term strategies are needed that aim to connect and complement existing cultural practices. It is argued in the following section that the use of creative arts can provide the link necessary to turn knowledge into practice.

## 4.2 The Art of Risk

The use of creative arts – music, dance, sculpture, architecture, painting, etc. – can provide (1) the means for a ‘common story’ that can strengthen self-worth and (2) a means of translating knowledge to practice through *experience* in the Pacific.

Art provides a vehicle for self-recognition as a society and it provides a mirror for society to reflect upon, to manage their past, and to discuss, mould and create their own identity through critical reflection. It provides an important tool for cultivating cultural depth and thus a stronger sense of self worth as a society. If this can be achieved, resilience to natural hazards will follow as an intrinsic desire to preserve contemporary social memory.

In more concrete terms, creative solutions are needed to encourage a desire to preserve the past and present for a more secure future. Investment in cultural traditions, such as establishing a museum of Carnival costumes and mask making in the Caribbean, would encourage cohesiveness. The uniqueness and vibrancy of the Pacific and the Caribbean, which is often reflected in the arts, provides a firm foundation for ensuring a more cohesive and bright future.

Of course, the role of art and cultural heritage is not a panacea for development or for DRR. The role of promoting stronger family units and education on parenting practices; encouraging economic diversity and long-term political strategies; increasing donor-recipient coordination and inter- and intra-regional coordination; investing in research and cost-benefit analyses; change in institutional structures; and the enforcement of building regulations, represents just some critical issues that would support the development of DRR. However, none of these initiatives will produce the desired outcomes if societal perceptions on risk are informed through a sense of complacency. Promoting societal self-worth and linking modern and indigenous ideas through creative practices may help to promote vibrant and creative cultures.

The main outcome of this study, as revealed through local art, is that the Pacific and the Caribbean hold different perceptions of risk. This determines how resilience is understood and how ideas on DRR from external sources can be and should be internalized. It is recommended that future DRR and resilience projects developed by international development organisations carefully consider how risk is constructed and articulated by how communities and states view the world. When a more equitable dialogue between the global and local can be achieved, a more resilient society has a better chance of becoming a reality in the future.

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