

# THE ORGANIC ISLAND

An ethnographic study of subsistence economics and creative  
resilience in the Lau Islands of Fiji

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the multifaceted dimensions of sociality found in subsistence economic activities in the Lau Islands of Fiji. Primarily based on fieldwork conducted on the island of Cicia, I examine how land and sea resources are socially manifested in the everyday lives of coastal indigenous iTaukei Fijians. With just a weekly flight and monthly ferry delivering supplies to Cicia from the main island of Viti Levu, subsistence resources are the most critical components to the day-to-day dietary of village communities on the island. Yet, subsistence resources are not just of nutritional value to villagers. The ecological foundation of subsistence economics also underpins extensive sets of knowledge practices, social relationships, and the human-environmental encompassment of the archipelago of Lau. By accounting for social values of sea and land, the thesis shows how ecology is a material foundation to human capabilities like creativity and resilience. Furthermore, by viewing ecology and people's lives as inseparably connected by history and practice, I demonstrate how temporalities of environmental, social, economic, and political relations of multidimensional scales take root within local realities in places like Cicia. As I argue, the socio-ecological foundation of rural villages in Fiji provides forms of leverage, not simply to resist political and economic forces, but also to envision social change by contesting conditions of monetary dependency inflicted by capitalism. Contextualized by the economic implications instigated by the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, I also discuss the historical resilience of subsistence, village-based economics to not only endure different crises, but creatively demonstrating its radical potential for societal reconfigurations. In order to do so, I have throughout the thesis adopted an Hocartian approach that accounts for the interisland relationships of Lau that are integral to the sociality of subsistence economics on Cicia.