

# **EMERGING FROM EMPIRE? DECOLONISATION IN THE PACIFIC**

**PROCEEDINGS OF A WORKSHOP AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
DECEMBER 1996**

**Edited by Donald Denoon  
Prepared for publication by Jude Shanahan  
July 1997**



*Australian National University*

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# Emerging from Empire? Decolonisation in the Pacific.

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## Introduction

These papers grew out of a workshop in the Division of Pacific and Asian History in the Australian National University in December 1996. A December workshop has become a regular mechanism for assembling Pacific historians, their affines and agnates, without the formality of registration, a secretariat - or much of a budget. Accordingly, we owe a great debt to the participants who came largely at their own expense or funded by their own institutions. We owe an equal debt to Maeve O'Collins and Mary Mortimer, for hosting the parties which allow the networking for which these events are best remembered.

Participation was greater than expected, so that the agenda became more formal than usual; yet ideas and propositions flowed from one session to another, in ways which these proceedings cannot capture. On the other hand we include three papers which complement those presented at the workshop. The scale and quality of the response reflects the fact that decolonisation has become salient again - its seeming completeness an illusion.

A minimal argument about the incompleteness of decolonisation points to the continuing saga of negotiations over the status of New Caledonia (Small, chapter 9), as well as France's other overseas territories in Polynesia and the Wallis and Futuna islands. Even with formal independence, sovereignty is sometimes hedged by formal limitations ('free association' with the ex-colonial power) in the former American Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (Petersen, chapter 10; Statham, chapter 11) as well as in the Cook Islands and New Zealand's other territories. More broadly, the institutional and ideological inheritance of the colonial period continues to influence people's behaviour and forms of polity and economy, with profound consequences even for generations born long after independence. It is these issues which Kabataulaka and Houma address in Solomon Islands (chapters 20 and 21) and Nadile for Papua New Guinea (chapter 22). They propose the urgent need for intellectual decolonisation, partly through closer attention to school and university curricula. A strategy on these lines was attempted by Ulli and Georgina Beier in the 1970s (Denoon, chapter 24), and Lacey (chapter 23) describes a much longer-term venture in the Enga province of Papua new Guinea. By contrast, resource companies and other agencies, who employ personnel with backgrounds in colonial administration, tend to perpetuate some of the values and procedures of an earlier era (Ballard and Banks, chapter 19). Manifestly the struggles to create an autonomous intelligentsia, and education systems for post-colonial societies are neither easy nor certain in their outcomes. Even where an independent government with ample financial resources attempts to undo the damage of a predatory colonialism (Pollock, chapter 12), it is difficult to avoid dependence upon the technical expertise - and the value systems - of former colonial powers.

A more radical critique goes beyond colonialism as residual, and finds signs of recolonisation in much of the third world, and especially in the Pacific. Evidence for this suspicion includes relations within the South Pacific Commission and other regional agencies, in which Australia and New Zealand now lobby for the appointment of their own nationals to key positions. Stewart Firth (chapter 2) judges that the high tide of decolonisation has passed, to be replaced by a variety of more complex arrangements. Barrie Macdonald (chapter 1) draws attention to the new prominence of 'governance' in the agendas of aid-donors, and of multilateral agencies including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Donors increasingly coordinate their influence on recipient countries, and argue that economic development cannot be separated from the

governmental institutions and social circumstances in which it takes place. Perversely, this potentially neo-colonial analysis restates Kwame Nkrumah's famous anti-colonial injunction 'Seek Ye First The Political Kingdom'. Assuming that 'good governance' is a precondition of economic transformation, financial support is made dependent upon a variety of specific conditions. These range far beyond the economic concerns have long preoccupied aid donors and their agencies: so much so that they may infringe on sovereignty itself.

Glenn Petersen (chapter 10) takes this argument a long stride further. He argues that colonisation - and decolonisation - can be understood as chapters in a longer narrative of hegemony and subordination, so that many empires conform to a predictable scenario. In the experience of the early United States, territorial expansion replicated many British imperial practices in creating and administering colonies of settlement. The democratic and anti-colonial rhetoric of the War of Independence made it intolerable for the United States to imagine itself as a colonial power, yet the substantive issues of governance had to be addressed. When the United States expanded into Mexico and the Caribbean, inhabited by 'alien' populations which might not be assimilable into the United States' political culture and institutions, participatory democracy and territorial expansion became awkward bed-fellows. In the long run the denial of colonialism entailed lack of clarity in dismantling what were essentially colonial institutions. The consequent constitutional and political muddle is elegantly analysed by Statham (chapter 11). Peterson argues persuasively that Geopolitics is the most helpful framework in which to comprehend United States relations with the Asia-Pacific region generally, and Micronesia in particular. On that view, both colonisation and decolonisation are incidental.

Similar trends can be perceived in the regional penumbra of white Australia. Among the most original chapters are those which treat Torres Strait Islanders as Pacific Islanders, rather than their more common context as remote or marginal Australians. Elu (chapter 16) argues that Queensland and the Australian Commonwealth have both imposed colonial controls and constraints on the people of the Torres Strait. The struggle to democratise government institutions (Mullins, chapter 17) therefore amounts to a long overdue essay in decolonisation. Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders, however, can also be seen as a sub-plot in the longer struggle by Aboriginal Australians to achieve a measure of self-government through the institution of ATSIC (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission). Together with Fletcher's account (chapter 18) of the unresolved issues confronting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and the vulnerability of Aboriginal autonomy to the vagaries of white Australian politics, we perceive that decolonisation is as much an issue in continental Australia, as in the more conventional ex-colony of Papua New Guinea. The salience of a 'Pacific' perspective on Australian affairs is equally clear in Clive Moore's account of South Sea Islanders' sustained struggle for recognition as a distinct, deeply disadvantaged immigrant community (chapter 25). The impact of that struggle on the formulation of school curriculum materials is dramatic. While niVanuatu and Solomon Islanders are comfortable with 'revisionist' history which emphasises their agency during the labour trade era (1860s to 1905), their Australian cousins insist on narratives which represent their ancestors as simple victims of blackbirding.

Seen from Australia, the Pacific Islands are dominated by Papua New Guinea, the home of three quarters of all Pacific Islanders, by far the largest of Australia's former colonial territories, the site of the biggest and bloodiest resource projects in the region, and the source of most Pacific news in the Australian media. It is also the source of current legends, with Australian politicians vying with each other for the praise (or opprobrium) due to the decision to decolonise. Not least of Nelson's virtues (in chapter 13) is his reconstruction of the decision-making chronology, and his consequent ability to butcher some sacred cows. May (chapter 14) reveals some of the decolonising dynamics and surprising influences within Papua New Guinea, while MacWilliam (chapter 15) demonstrates how the largest Australian company in Papua New Guinea addressed the challenges of a post-colonial economic regime.

These papers focus more strongly on metropolitan policy-making than on colonial independence movements. This distinction is arbitrary, since each interacted with the other discourse; but it does serve to narrow the agenda and to focus our attention on manageable questions. Peter Larmour's overview (chapter 26) offers a range of ways of thinking about decolonisation. His framework helps us to understand some Pacific paradoxes, whereby (for example) the most powerful anti-colonial movements (Pouvanaa a Oopa's *Rassemblement Democratique des Populations Tahitiennes* and its successors in Tahiti, and the FLNKS in New Caledonia) have not so far succeeded, whereas the reluctance of many Fijian leaders to contemplate independence was eventually overcome by a British government determined to depart (Lal, chapter 4). Conversely the relatively early independence of Western Samoa, commonly attributed either to divine guidance or the power of the *mau* protest movement of the 1920s and 1930s, clearly requires a more nuanced analysis of the kind which Liua'ana offers (chapter 5). Ambrose (chapter 6) and Morgan (chapter 7) go a long way to penetrate the orthodox interpretations of Vanuatu's release from the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides, demonstrating that secessionist and autonomists in Santo and Tanna were far from passive puppets of neo-colonial manipulation, and had compelling reasons for the strategies which led them to oppose the dominant *Vanua'aku Pati*. Both the indigenous and the metropolitan politics of decolonisation prove much more subtle than was believed in the heady days when independence was formally achieved.

Donald Denoon, Canberra, June 1997.





## **Decolonisation and 'Good' Governance: Precedents and Continuities**

**Barrie Macdonald, Massey University**

Decolonisation, or 'the Transfer of Power', is often regarded as the end-point of a process that began with imperial expansion and colonisation. There is a neat balance between colonialism and decolonisation that, depending on the point of view, reflects either the advance and retreat of imperial power, or the loss and recovery of sovereignty. This process is one of the defining features of empire, decolonisation, and the post-colonial world. Even so, it is not a universal process: some dependencies retained their sovereignty; and some former dependencies still retain a compromised sovereignty. Tonga under its Treaty of Friendship with Britain, and Solomon Islands as a protectorate, did not formally relinquish sovereignty; and, in New Guinea, Nauru and Western Samoa under League of Nations Mandates and United Nations Trusteeships, sovereignty was held in abeyance. Now, under Free Association agreements, there are restraints on the sovereignty of the Cook Islands and several countries of Micronesia. Despite these qualifications in terms of formal status, the countries of the Pacific Islands, together with many Asian, African and Caribbean countries, have shared a colonial experience that passed through decolonisation, culminating in 'independence', or something close to it, with all appropriate national (and nationalist) celebrations.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the focus on independence as the primary outcome of decolonisation, there are continuities. Most obviously, these relate to continuing relations between the colonial power and its former dependency - in ways like the provision of financial and technical assistance, trade and financial relations, but also in more subtle forms like the structure and language of government, educational curricula, sources of private sector investment, the cultural orientation of all that is not indigenous, and even the predominance of certain brands of vehicles, appliances and consumer products. Few newly independent countries have the means, or the inclination, to commit the major self-denial involved in rejecting these artifacts of a past relationship. Moreover, continuing investment by transnational companies, especially in resource-exploitation, can represent an imperial presence no less potent than formal colonial rule.

A longer-term view of the relationship between those countries that were once the governors and those that were governed also suggests that decolonisation is just one phase in a relationship, beginning with imperial encroachment, in which power or leverage has fluctuated. On the pre-colonial frontier, the initiative often lay with hosts rather than intruders, and annexation did not necessarily reflect or signal the dominance of the imperial power. Colonialism brought control, fragile in cases, before nationalist challenges to that control in some cases caused, and in others hastened, decolonisation. Independence in much of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands coincided with the Cold War which gave Third World countries generally the opportunity to play off one power against the another, and thus maximise access to aid funds, and minimise the control over aid-expenditure or other aspects of the recipient nation's internal affairs. Within the last decade, the ending of Cold War competition, and other factors, have allowed aid donors to apply conditions to aid and Third World relationships which shift the balance of leverage back towards donors. With their preoccupation with human rights and 'good governance', these donors and their international agencies, now impose conditions reminiscent of decolonisation policies and the 'conditions' for independence in the 1940s and 1950s.

As the first modern decolonising power, Britain set in place a number of conditions for the independence of its dependencies: these included a form of parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model, an independent public service, guarantees for basic human rights, and mechanisms for administrative support and financial accountability. There was emphasis on trade union development (a condition of Colonial Development and Welfare funds), growth in higher education and the development of mass media. It was also assumed that, within the limits imposed by resources,

the basic administrative and communications infrastructure, and social services, had been developed. And it was believed that a balanced budget, and a capacity to pay the recurrent costs of government (if not the capital cost of development) were an important guarantee of 'true' independence. The government of the emergent nation had to win the mandate of its people and demonstrate its capacity to provide a stable government.

The good governance agenda has the same concern with democratisation, sound economic management, and the development of civil society, and presents them as conditions not for decolonisation, but for aid-flows and international acceptance. This raises the question whether, when a country fails to meet these conditions, it will face the alternatives of an effective loss of sovereignty, or a loss of development assistance - in effect, a reversion to some form of external control.

There is now a substantial literature on the emergence of the good governance agenda, including policy statements by the World Bank and several bilateral donors.<sup>2</sup> As well as debating the antecedents of good governance, its preconditions and implications, aid donors have shown increasing interest in 'check-lists' which, though varying in detail, organisation, and specific criteria, have a common set of principles:

- a democratic system of government
- the protection of Human Rights
- an impartial and competent legal system
- competent Public Sector Management
- a market-friendly economy
- robust institutions of civil society.

### **Emergence of the Good Governance Agenda**

The good governance agenda has diverse origins. A major influence is the World Bank which began to question the foundations of its own development policies in the late 1980s. More weight was placed on local participation in project design and implementation, environmental issues, the requirements of sustainable development, and on the involvement of women in development. More fundamentally, the Bank's preoccupation with macro-economic policy ahead of underlying issues of governance came under scrutiny. While recognising that its Charter prevented it from addressing political issues, the Bank began to interpret its brief more broadly.<sup>3</sup>

In 1989, a World Bank assessment of development policies and projects in sub-Saharan Africa demonstrated a high failure rate of projects and structural adjustment programs undertaken by the Bank.<sup>4</sup> Even in those countries that had undergone restructuring with some effect, private investors, sceptical about long-term prospects, remained reluctant to become involved. The survey showed a preponderance of authoritarian regimes, large-scale corruption, and abuses of Human Rights. The Bank concluded that these factors undermined the prospects for democracy and economic growth and that fundamental failures of governance were a decisive barrier to sustainable economic growth. In subsequent papers, the World Bank identified three key areas of concern:

- the *form* of political regime;
- the *process* by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources; and
- the *capacity* of governments to design, formulate, and implement policies and discharge functions.<sup>5</sup>

Advocacy of good governance by major bilateral Western donors also dates from the early 1990s. The

collapse of the Soviet Union and the ending of the Cold War meant that there was less emphasis on political expediency and security imperatives and lower priority given to military assistance and the purchase of arms. There was also concern with the effectiveness of aid delivery mechanisms, and more emphasis on local participation and wider use of Non-Governmental Organisations. Economic difficulties in the donor countries where voters were resistant to higher taxes and reluctant to fund what were seen as corrupt and authoritarian regimes in the Third World, brought a re-examination of the principles and levels of assistance. As a consequence, the philosophy and moral rationale underlying aid distribution were re-defined to place a stronger emphasis on democratisation and economic reform, with long term goals of improving the quality of governance and the prospects for sustainable development.<sup>6</sup>

In some respects, the new orthodoxy turns on its head earlier development approaches favoured by the former colonial powers, no less than the World Bank, that assumed that stable democracy could only be established on a foundation of economic development and national civil institutions and values. On this view, economic development and democratisation might prove incompatible, in which case democratisation must be subordinated to economic liberalisation and structural adjustment. What is new about the good governance agenda, at least compared with the recent past is 'the proposition that democracy is a necessary prior or parallel condition of development, not an outcome of it'.<sup>7</sup>

### **Issues Arising from the Governance Debate**

While there is a degree of commonality in donor views of good governance, the agenda has not gone unchallenged. Recipient countries, for example, suspect that the good governance agenda has a sub-text of a reduction in aid flows to the Third World, partly because of the conflicting demands for investment in Eastern Europe, and partly to reduce aid flows overall. The counter argument is that aid flows must be at least contained, if not reduced, because of the declining capacity of donors (and the will of their taxpayers) to pay. It follows that, if good governance is the key to effective aid delivery and utilisation, and to economic growth, then allocations and investments should be made accordingly.

Critics suggest that the World Bank turned the spotlight on to governance issues as least partly to emphasise the difficulties of project implementation where there is poor governance, and to allay concerns that development failure might be caused by fundamental flaws in the economic policies advocated by the Bank itself over recent decades. Moreover, it has been suggested that, at least in part, the Bank has used governance issues as a mechanism for avoiding that provision in its Charter that excludes it from becoming involved in political issues.

These are issues of debate, but the agenda also raises more fundamental questions about the nature of development and economic growth. Drawing on models of the Western experience, the good governance agenda presupposes that representative democracy will encourage the growth of a market economy while providing accountable government. In suggesting that 'good' government is democratic and *will* lead to economic growth, governance proponents reject the argument (most commonly heard from Asian governments) that democracy does not necessarily provide the discipline necessary to promote economic development and alleviate poverty.

This raises the further issue of whether it is the role of the state or free market economics that makes a difference. A recent analysis of Asian economies by Clark and Chan explored a range of variables and concluded that neither approach - alone or in partnership - can explain the relative success or failure of Asian economies over recent decades.<sup>8</sup> They argue that 'recourse is necessary to additional variables', leading them to a call for 'bringing society back in'. This means not just social factors in general, but the structure and values of specific societies. These conclusions coincide with my own research in the Republic of Kiribati.<sup>9</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the good governance approach, as currently conceived, takes insufficient account of social and political processes and structures, and that reforms may well fail for this reason.<sup>10</sup>

As it developed its policy on good governance in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the World Bank and

similar agencies introduced economic conditionality as part of 'adjustment' packages that bailed out the economic disasters of the Third World. Inevitably, conditionality is seen as an implicit attack on sovereignty and as a mechanism for neo-colonial control. The effectiveness of conditionality, however it is packaged, has been questioned on several grounds. First, conditionality depends upon the leverage that can be exerted by the party imposing the conditions and is effective only while the advantage remains unless it succeeds in bringing about a transformation in the recipient state.

In so far as it seeks to bring about a transformation of political structure and policy in a recipient state, this attempt to exert control over a national government seems at odds with the promotion of democratisation, transparency, participation and accountability that are part of the good governance agenda. External insistence on changes to human rights practice, multi-party democracy and economic liberalisation create an artificial electoral contest in which important policy matters are effectively sidelined. This raises the question of the threshold that must be crossed to justify the imposition of conditions/sanctions by other nations or, to take it to the ultimate stage, the invasion and 'control' of a recipient state by an outside power or powers.

There is evidence that the good governance approach is increasingly applied in the Pacific, and will be a factor in shaping economic management and the operations of political and administrative systems. If we take the most obvious cases, the evidence suggests that the imposition of conditions depends on a crisis which cannot be controlled by the recipient government. In the case of the Cook Islands, the country was bordering on bankruptcy and had few options once its major aid donors joined behind the Asian Development Bank in preparing a package that involved, among other things, a halving of the public service and a reduction of salaries and allowances for those who remained. In Papua New Guinea, where the World Bank and Australia withheld the second phase of an adjustment package pending reforms, the government conceded important ground but retains a degree of initiative because of the wealth and scale of its export industries. In Solomon Islands, where unsustainable forestry is of concern among donors, the level of that exploitation effectively insulates that government from this sort of conditionality while commercial stands of forest remain.

Pacific Islands examples also raise questions about the relative importance of form, process and capacity of government in creating good governance for the longer term. While the constitutions of Fiji and Tonga have been attacked for the manner in which the democratic rights of individuals and ethnic groups are legally compromised, it might be argued that the democratic rights of the citizens of Papua New Guinea are more compromised, *in practice*, by their government's inability to deliver services, education, freedom of movement and an orderly society. The *capacity* of governments is the key to the provision of effective political rights and to the guarantee of Human Rights in practice. It is also the capacity of governments that governs the delivery of social services, the fostering of mass media, even the administration of fair elections, as well as the creation of an informed public which remains the most effective check on dictatorship, oppression and corruption.

### **Parallels with Decolonisation**

All of this is reminiscent of the preoccupations of the colonial powers in the immediate postwar period during the development of decolonisation policies - first by the British government, then by other European powers. The governance debate also recalls the academic literature of the earlier period with modernisation theory (with its emphasis on what we now call the development of civil society) and political development theory to the fore.<sup>11</sup> The underlying issue, for good governance now as for decolonisation a generation ago, is the balance of power between the metropolitan power and the former dependency. At stake, is the extent to which the colony or former colony can continue to determine its own political structure and economic policy (as measured, for example, in terms of corruption, oppression and incompetence) and, ultimately, the shape of its own society.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Britain began to address more directly the dilemmas of decolonisation that were implicit in Empire, and had only been partially resolved by the earlier evolution towards Dominion status by the former 'white' colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Britain was committed to the decolonisation of India, but it was by no means clear whether this same path would be open to other Asian and African dependencies; at this time, the smallness of the Caribbean and Pacific dependencies seemed to preclude independence. Indeed, as late as the 1950s, officials of the Commonwealth Office assumed that a population of five million represented a reasonable lower threshold for independence - until they realised that New Zealand had some two million people at the time.<sup>12</sup>

The expectation was that colonies would proceed to independence within the Commonwealth which, in itself, posed issues for Britain. Although the principle was accepted, there was little realisation of the pace of change that would be forced upon the colonial powers by their own circumstances and by the strength of anti-colonial nationalism. As late as 1939, Malcolm Macdonald, Secretary of State for the Colonies, still believed that decolonisation would be a 'slow, evolutionary process' and that it might take 'generations, or even centuries, for the peoples of some parts of the Colonial Empire to achieve self-government'.<sup>13</sup> During the Second World War, these issues took on a new urgency which prompted moves towards political reform, based on the development of democratic local government, replacing indirect rule and district administrations. There was also a dawning realisation that, against this tide, there would need to be an accommodation of long-standing strategic concerns in places like Cyprus and Malta, and privileges accorded to white settler groups, especially in East Africa.<sup>14</sup>

The Balfour Declaration of 1926 had declared of the settler dominions that:

*They are autonomous communities within the British Empire, in no way subordinate to one another in respect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.*

Despite the Balfour Declaration, and the Statute of Westminster which gave it constitutional substance in 1931, there was still an assumption that 'autonomous' meant something more like internal self-government than full independence and that, on behalf of the Empire and Commonwealth, Britain would continue to have a dominant voice in international affairs. Not until the independence of India in 1947, and Krishna Menon's insistence that India would eschew both West and East in favour of a Third, non-aligned, World, were the implications of decolonisation for the world order fully realised.

Many factors underlay the formulation of these policies and mechanisms for decolonisation. Anti-colonial nationalism, and the implied cost of retaining imperial possessions, was a major factor. So, too, was the recognition of the contribution that the Empire had made to the War effort. Following on, there was an assumption that the Empire could continue to make an economic contribution but that this might carry a cost in terms of political concessions. India had shown the potential strength of colonial nationalism, as had parallel movements in Indonesia and the Philippines. Within the Empire, the Accra Riots in the Gold Coast in 1948, and the Kenyan Mau Mau from 1952, maintained the pressure and removed any lingering conviction that the Empire could be retained.

Even so, these pressures accelerated an inexorable process, rather than forcing a new direction. Britain's acceptance of decolonisation was not yet shared by all other colonial powers. From about 1943, however, the United States became a strong colonial critic.<sup>15</sup> As Britain's banker, and in the United Nations, it exerted powerful influence against the maintenance of Empire while, ironically, extending its own colonial role in Micronesia. The Soviet Union (extending its own hegemony in Eastern Europe) preached independence at the United Nations and in the dependent empires of the Western Bloc. France, on the other hand, seemed unaffected. At the Brazzaville conference of 1944, France rejected even the prospect of internal self-government for its African possessions:

*The goals of the task of civilization accomplished by France in her colonies rule out any idea of autonomy, any possibility of evolution outside the French bloc of the empire; the eventual creation, even in the distant future, of self-government for the colonies is to be set aside.<sup>16</sup>*

## Decolonisation in Practice

In facilitating the decolonisation of its own Empire, once India had moved to independence in 1947, Britain developed a number of strategies which, like the management of the Empire, were in accord with fundamental British interests, met local circumstances, and proved capable of infinite flexibility and adaptability in their implementation. There was, in other words, a steady 'erosion' of the principles that had informed policies of imperial disengagement for a generation or more - for example, an innovative use of Westminster model of constitutional development which was predicated on a two- or multi-party system of parliamentary democracy. The original expectation that newly decolonised countries would still acknowledge the leadership of Britain in international affairs proved untenable in practice.

The transition from Empire to Commonwealth also brought an accommodation of republican status within the Commonwealth, and acceptance of the monarch as Head of the Commonwealth, rather than as Head of State of every Commonwealth country. There were experiments with federal structures in Africa and the Caribbean and, briefly, with Free Association as an alternative for very small countries. In Africa, in particular, local government reforms were intended to provide the mechanism for a shift from the policies of indirect rule that had dominated the inter-war years, towards participatory democracy. Politicisation of local government, in combination with growing expressions of anti-colonialism, and frustrated socio-economic aspirations provided the driving force behind local demands for decolonisation. The notion that 'true' political independence was only meaningful alongside economic independence gave way to programs for economic investment, the provision of infrastructure and social development under technical co-operation, Colonial Development and Welfare projects and similar schemes. These were strategies and mechanisms that would meet the British desire for disengagement and the colonial demand for self-determination in terms of underlying, and largely unchanging, conditions for moving first to internal self-government, and then independence. As indicated above, these basic conditions were the existence of a participatory democracy, the protection of human rights and minority interests, a functioning and politically neutral bureaucracy, economic independence for at least the recurrent budget and a range of private religious, social or commercial organisations reflecting what we would now call a functioning civil society. These priorities brought the development of economic planning and an emphasis on higher education, technical training and the localisation of the public service.

On these principles, Britain supervised the decolonisation of its South and Southeast Asian dependencies from 1947 through the 1950s, and the move to independence of most of Sub-Saharan Africa between 1957 and the early 1960s. The process was accelerated by the arrival of new states at the United Nations, and the passing of the General Assembly's celebrated Resolution 1514 of 1960 which established the Committee of Twenty-Four and declared that a lack of economic and social preparedness was no longer a barrier to independence. France experimented first with the French Community of De Gaulle's Fifth Republic and then settled for a close post-colonial relationship with former dependencies. Other developments of that time - the Congo crisis of 1960, the Sharpsville massacre in South Africa, the British government's recognition of the 'Wind of Change', and the background of the Cold War created irresistible pressures for Third World independence and further meant that, once the territories were independent, the conditions that had applied for securing independence were no longer enforceable. There was a continuing attempt to protect the territorial integrity of new states, but little else remained the same. Parliamentary democracies gave way to one-party states, dictatorships, and military coups. The expectation of economic independence, at least for the recurrent budget, was abandoned. Events in Rhodesia and Uganda showed that old and new Commonwealths were divided on basic principles, and on their degree of willingness to declare (and enforce) sanctions against delinquent states.

The international politics of the Cold War ensured that the standards or conditions for new states that had been largely agreed in the 1940s experienced a continuing erosion over the next forty years. Efforts to shift the ground - like President Carter's emphasis on human rights in the 1970s, for example - had

little chance of success. UN Resolution 1514 of 1960, which made nationalist demands the first principle of decolonisation, and the resolute refusal of Third World nations to police one another's affairs, helped ensure the preservation of the status quo. The looming economic crisis faced by many developing countries was deferred if not alleviated in the 1970s by the redistribution of petro-dollars after the oil shocks earlier in the decade. In dealing with the subsequent (and to some extent consequent) Third World debt crisis of the 1980s, neither bi-lateral donors nor international agencies made much progress against the backdrop of the crumbling Eastern Bloc and a stalled Cold War.

The end of the Cold War, the determination of the international community to effect change in South Africa, and a new willingness of Third World countries to intervene in the affairs of other developing countries - as the Commonwealth has in Nigeria since 1995 - all help to set the scene for change. A reappraisal of aid priorities by donors, and initiatives by the World Bank and other agencies, has also had an impact. Poor governance and the denial of democratic rights are now seen, with poor economic management, as the root causes of continuing Third World poverty. The failing administrative capacity of Third World governments is both a consequence and cause of the difficulty. Donors argue that economic restructuring must be undertaken alongside attempts to reform the nature of governments in the Third World, the promotion of democratic processes, the protection of Human Rights, and the development of civil society. Freed from the aid-competition of the Cold War, donors are more powerful politically, and determined to hold the high moral ground, especially on human rights. These developments have seen the introduction of political conditionality in setting aid priorities and the approval of aid programs since the early 1990s.

### **Governance and Decolonisation**

The development of this conditionality, and the good governance agenda of which it is a part, brings me back to the criteria for independence developed in the 1940s: the guarantee of democratic process; effective government; economic independence; and the development of a strong civil society. These same features are the essence of the good governance agenda, though justified in different terms. It might be argued that these differing justifications make a difference, or that both sets of conditions simply reflect universal values. Be that as it may, there remains a tension between the principles of sovereign independence and any attempt from outside to determine the shape of a government or its policy directions.

The supposedly new emphasis on good governance, that binds Western models of democracy with the free market policies of the World Bank, raises the question whether Western donors seek to link inappropriate cultural and political models of democracy, to economic models that have demonstrably failed. Both models lie at the heart of the conditions now applied by donors. The rejection by recipient nations of conditionality imposed by bilateral donors or the World Bank as an affront to sovereignty is as central to the rhetoric of the governance debate now as it was to anti-colonialism in the 1960s. The moral high ground would now be claimed by those who argued that, where the compact between governors and governed has been broken to the point that human rights are jeopardised or poverty imposed, external powers have not only a right but a duty to intervene. Such a view might be found in non-governmental organisations as well as marginalised minorities and opposition groups in Third World countries.

Against this, it might be argued that such a level of external influence over the structure and policies of national governments as are now sought by donors are more appropriate to a colonial relationship than to relations between sovereign nations. While it is difficult to make a definitive case either way between good governance as neo-colonialism or as principled reform (or, indeed, as the former as the means to the latter), the common features of the debates on development and modernisation in the decolonisation era and the post Cold War era are more striking than the differences. For example:

*politics and economics have a close relationship in matters of development. The extension of political freedom is an indifferent objective if the economic basis for the operation of that freedom is not properly laid. In any case, progress to a sound economy depends on the*



*co-operation of the people and recognition of their political aspirations...*

*Self-government and independent status are the natural ambition of most colonial people. They want to govern themselves as free citizens; they want government that is representative and responsible... But if democratic self-government were not to become dangerous and futile, informed public opinion had to become an essential feature of the system, and that could only be secured by social and economic progress. Democratic government in the hands of ignorant and politically inexperienced people can easily become unworkable... Widespread education, means of information and a critical and responsible press seemed... to be among the indispensable factors in the working of political democracy.*

*... Independence, when it comes, is weakened if the country concerned is economically and politically unstable, or not economically viable.<sup>17</sup>*

The rhetoric of Arthur Creech Jones, Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1946 to 1950, is remarkably like that of modernisation theorists of the 1960s and 'good governance' advocates in the 1990s. What were the conditions of moving to independence, are fast becoming the conditions of exercising sovereignty after the Cold War. Evoking human rights concerns and promoting more open government, donors demand more democratic governments, competent governance, and market friendly economies in the Third World. As with decolonisation, the outcome of good governance initiatives in terms of political structures and economic policy may be to make 'them' appear to be more like 'us'.<sup>18</sup>

1 Yash Ghai, 'Constitutional Issues in the Transition to Independence', in Ron Crocombe and Ahmed Ali, *Foreign Forces in Pacific Politics*, Suva, 1983, 24-65; Barrie Macdonald, 'Decolonization and Beyond: The Framework for Post-Colonial Relationships in the Pacific Islands', *Journal of Pacific History*, 1986.

2. See Carol Lancaster, 'Governance and Development: The Views from Washington', *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin*, 1993; Peter Larmour (ed.), *Governance and Good Government: Policy and Implementation in the South Pacific*, Canberra, 1995; Adrian Leftwich, 'Governance, Democracy and Development in the Third World', *Third World Quarterly*, 1993; Mahmood Monshipouri, *Democratization, Liberalization and Human Rights in the Third World*, Boulder, 1995; Mick Moore, 'The Emergence of the 'Good Government' Agenda: Some Milestones', *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin*, 1993; World Bank, *Governance: A Review*, Washington, 1991; World Bank, *Governance and Development*, Washington, 1992; World Bank,, Washington, 1993.

3 For a more extensive discussion, see Barrie Macdonald, '"Good" Governance and Pacific Islands States', in Peter Larmour (ed.), *Governance in the Pacific Islands*, Canberra, 1997.

4 World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, Washington, 1989.

5 World Bank, *Governance and Development*, 58.

6 Lancaster, 'Governance and Development', 14.

7 Leftwich, 'Governance, Democracy and Development', 605.

8 Cal Clark and Steve Chan, 'The development Roles of the State: Moving Beyond the Developmental State in Conceptualizing Asian Political Economies', *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 1994.

9 Barrie Macdonald, *Governance and Political Process in Kiribati*, ANU Economics Division Working Paper 2/96, 1996.

10 Macdonald, 'Governance in Oceania', in Larmour, *Governance and Good Government*, 21-27.

11 See, for example, David Apter, *The Politics of Modernization*, Chicago, 1965 and *Some Conceptual Approaches to the Study of Modernization*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1968; Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, New York, 1958.

12 W. David McIntyre, 'The Admission of Small States to the Commonwealth', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 1996.

13 Quoted in Dennis Austen, 'The Transfer of Power: Why and How', in W.H. Morris-Jones and Georges Fischer (eds), *Decolonisation and After: The British and French Experience*, London, 1980, 7.

14 For general surveys of British decolonisation, see David Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics 1945-1961: From 'Colonial Development' to 'Wind of Change'*, Oxford, 1977; D.A. Low, *Eclipse of Empire*, Cambridge, 1991; Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, London, 1969; W.D. McIntyre, *Colonies into Commonwealth*, London, 3rd edn, 1974.

15 See Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonisation of the British Empire*, Oxford, 1977.

16 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 45.

17 Arthur Creech Jones, 'The Labour Party and Colonial Policy', in Arthur Creech Jones (ed.), *New Fabian Colonial Essays*, London, 1959, 25-26..

18 For a similar comment with reference to US policy in Micronesia, see David Hanlon, 'The End of History for the Edge of Paradise? Economic Development and the Compact of Free Association in American Micronesia', Brij V. Lal and Hank Nelson (eds), *Lines Across the Sea: Colonial Inheritance in the Post Colonial Pacific*, Pacific History Association, 1995, 83-94.

## **The Rise and Fall of Decolonisation in the Pacific<sup>1</sup>**

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Decolonisation has one clear and unambiguous meaning in the history of the international system of states since World War II. It refers to the withdrawal of the colonial powers from direct legal and constitutional control over their territories. The process by which the modern states system of Africa, South-East Asia and the Pacific Islands came into being is 'decolonisation' as envisaged by the United Nations in the 1960 decolonisation resolutions, which were passed at the height of international enthusiasm for the dismantling of the colonial empires.

If we adopt this straightforward definition in the Pacific we start with the independence gained by Western Samoa from New Zealand in 1962, proceed to the withdrawal of the Netherlands, Britain, Australia and New Zealand up to 1980, move to the decolonisation of American Micronesia and end with the achievement of independence by the Republic of Palau in October 1994. We should also note New Zealand's delegation of certain powers to Tokelau in 1994 and preparations for an eventual act of self-determination.<sup>2</sup> A strictly constitutional definition of this kind underlay the classic surveys by J. W. Davidson, Barrie Macdonald, Peter Larmour and Yash Ghai.<sup>3</sup>

By this account, decolonisation is a clearly identifiable process of transferring legal and constitutional power from colonial élites to the élites of newly formed sovereign states, with some limitations in the case of the five freely associated states. No further decolonisation is thought necessary within these states because the colonised people are deemed to have achieved freedom and self-determination. In the region, the most obvious exceptions to this process are the French territories. New Caledonia and French Polynesia fit the model of territories that the international community regards as requiring to be decolonised. They are under the control of one of the old colonial powers, France, which has retreated from much of the remainder of its empire and - so the argument goes - should quit the Pacific as well. In tabular form, decolonisation appears thus:

<b>Year of Independence</b>	<b>Colonial Power</b>
1962 Western Samoa	New Zealand
1963 Irian Jaya	Netherlands
1965 Cook Islands*	New Zealand
1968 Nauru	Australia
1970 Fiji	United Kingdom
1970 Tonga	United Kingdom
1973 Niue*	New Zealand
1975 Papua New Guinea	Australia
1978 Tuvalu	United Kingdom
1978 Solomon Islands	United Kingdom
1979 Kiribati	United Kingdom
1980 Vanuatu	United Kingdom and France

1986 Marshall Islands*	U.S.A.
1986 Federated States of Micronesia*	U.S.A.
1994 Belau*	U.S.A.

\*In free association with former colonial power.

This simple, constitutional model no longer encompasses the complex reality of the issue. Decolonisation now assumes a variety of meanings in a variety of contexts, and is the goal of widely disparate political movements - traditionally anti-colonial in the French territories, secessionist in Papua New Guinea and the Melanesian edge of Indonesia, redistributive and culturally assertive in Hawai'i, Guam, New Zealand and Australia. Some Pacific Islanders who are not supposed to want decolonisation agitate for it, while others who might be expected to want national freedom prefer territorial status. The rhetoric of decolonisation and sovereignty has become ubiquitous in the politics of the Pacific Islands.

Recent observers have noted the shift. Robert Kiste's 1994 survey of the United States' role in decolonisation includes not only the American withdrawal from the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands but also resurgent Hawai'ian nationalism and the movement for a sovereign Hawai'ian nation. In a companion study, Terence Wesley Smith examines Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau before adding a discussion of Maori political activism entitled 'Decolonizing New Zealand'.<sup>4</sup> Numerous commentators on the Bougainville revolt point to what Peter Larmour calls the problematic relationship in Papua New Guinea between 'political system and territory', while the secessionists have consistently appealed to the logic of decolonisation by which every nation deserves its own state.<sup>5</sup> Here I reflect on the state of decolonisation, and try to synthesise the diverse strands of the story.

### **Legitimizing the State**

Pacific Islands decolonisation is bound up with strongly held beliefs about race, nation and culture and therefore is deeply rooted in illusion and ideology. Beliefs about distinct races have no foundation in genetics. Those about nation rest on unsupportable generalisations about homelands and identity. Culture is notoriously elusive. Yet race, nation and culture possess a compelling reality in politics and constitute the ideological underpinnings of the modern nation-state.

The nation, as Benedict Anderson has famously phrased it, is an 'imagined community', a projection of identity by individuals on to others who speak the same language or live within the borders of the same nation-state; and while this sense of identity has a natural basis in ease of communication and sharing a homeland, it is also the artificial product of symbols, rituals and histories promoted to make people believe that they belong to this community and owe it loyalty.<sup>6</sup> 'Culture' might be an indispensable word to describe the interconnected beliefs and practices of human groups. But who is to say where cultures begin and end? Where does Maori culture, for example, shade into pakeha?

The other actor in decolonisation is less illusory and easier to define. This is the state, the principal political legacy of colonialism and the characteristically Western and modern form of organising political communities on a large scale. The state, that social organisation which claims a monopoly of ultimate political authority within a defined territory, needs sustenance in the form of legitimacy. It needs people to believe it has a right to rule. New states must seek legitimacy from new 'nations', that is, from the belief of citizens that their identity and destiny are bound up with those of others within the same political communities. At this point the tangible state, consisting of the government, the bureaucracy and the forces of coercive authority (police or military or both), comes to depend on the far less tangible 'nation' or 'culture', or in some cases, the genetically non-existent but ideologically potent 'race'.

By creating the modern state, colonialism redefines forms of political legitimacy. Whereas earlier claims to political authority might have rested on convictions about superior hereditary rank (as in precolonial Hawai'i) or superior ability to amass and distribute wealth (as in precolonial Vanuatu), and even though such beliefs might persist, the new state élites nurture beliefs that are themselves ideological inheritances of colonialism. They must do so because, like everyone else, they are heirs to the nationalist idea expressed in the French Revolution. Governments in the late twentieth century, of old states and new, base their right to rule on the claim that state and nation coincide and that the state is the expression in political terms of its cultural counterpart the nation.

The rhetoric of decolonisation in Africa, South-East Asia and the Pacific was inspired by the fiction that, after a period of foreign domination, an entity called the nation (or the people) was once again permitted to rule itself; either that, or a new nation was being born. At independence ceremonies new states are 'born' into the 'family of nations' or, in a related analogy, they are children reaching adulthood and permitted to make their own way in the world. President Reagan employed just such a metaphor in his speech to the peoples of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia when they were deemed to have achieved independence in 1986. But what was the nation and who were the people?

In fact they were the populations who happened to live within borders of the colonial territories that became new states and, more often than not, they were divided linguistically and culturally into antagonistic or competitive groups.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes colonial powers could divide such territories before independence so as to achieve a better accommodation between self-identifying cultural groups and new states. When territories consisted of islands, already separated from others by the ocean, such divisions were easily made. The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was once supposed to succeed to statehood as one country. Under pressure from the Islanders, the United States partitioned it into four entities, which became the Commonwealth of the Marianas, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau. Similarly Britain accepted the secession of the Ellice Islands from the Gilberts in 1976 and the formation of two independent states instead of one, Tuvalu and Kiribati.<sup>8</sup>

In the different cultural and geographical circumstances of Melanesia, where hundreds of language groups populated each colonial territory, such partitions were impossible. The same principle applied to Melanesian colonial territories would have produced a parody of the modern states system, with hundreds of microstates each corresponding to a self-identifying micronational group. The ultimate logic of the nation-state would have been fulfilled at the cost of absurdity. Decolonisation was therefore much more successful in some parts of the Pacific than in others in creating a strong foundation for the political legitimacy of new state élites. Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea entered independence as multinational states susceptible to secessionist movements. The Western Solomons breakaway movement briefly threatened to split Solomon Islands at the point of independence in 1978, Vanuatu confronted a secessionist revolt on the island of Santo in 1980 and Papua New Guinea has been torn by the Bougainville rebellion since 1988. West Papua has itself sought to secede since it was absorbed into Indonesia as the province of Irian Jaya in 1963.<sup>9</sup>

### **Secessions and Sovereignities**

The region's two main secessionist movements are both in Melanesia, one in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya and the other on Bougainville. Secessionists seek freedom from new forms of colonial domination created, ironically, by the decolonisation process itself. Most of the Melanesian population of Irian Jaya, as far as we can determine, do not regard their decolonisation in the 1960s, when the international community acquiesced in their being handed over by the Dutch to Indonesia, as self-determination. Quite the reverse: an armed struggle against the Indonesian authorities has been pursued ever since by the OPM, the Movement for Free Papua, a loosely-knit collection of jungle guerillas who regard Indonesia as a new colonial overlord that should be expelled from their homeland. The forgotten war

in Irian Jaya has led to the deaths of ten of thousands of Melanesian villagers and should be seen as the most important nationalist revolt ever undertaken by Pacific Islanders. Sporadic skirmishes continue. OPM guerrillas are said to have raised the flag of independent West Papua at Tsinga village in southern Irian Jaya on two occasions in 1994, and to have killed a bulldozer driver employed by Freeport Indonesia, the mainly American-owned mining company that operates the Grasberg mine, in November. Apparently in retaliation, the Indonesian armed forces killed an unknown number of Melanesians - just one according to official sources and over twenty according to the Australian Council for Overseas Aid. Similar reports came in 1995, in the form of charges by the Catholic Bishop of Jayapura that soldiers were responsible for the murder and torture of Melanesians near the town of Timika<sup>10</sup>. The Indonesian government does not deny that its military forces are in constant conflict with secessionists in different parts of the country: 'We are operating all day long', a military spokesman said in April 1995, 'We operate in Irian Jaya, Aceh and East Timor, all day long'.<sup>11</sup>

We tend to minimise Irian Jaya in the story of Islands independence. We are caught in a rhetoric of region that brings the South Pacific to an abrupt end along the Indonesian border. The standard definition of the region embraces the twenty-two island states and territories of the South Pacific Commission area from the Northern Marianas to Pitcairn Island and excludes the western half of the island of New Guinea. And the standard definition of decolonisation is that it can occur only once because new states by definition cannot themselves be colonisers. The doctrine is a political necessity for new states threatened by secession, and for this reason the international community has consistently endorsed a definition of decolonisation that focuses on territories under the control of the old colonial powers. It recognises first-stage decolonisation movements, those that seek freedom from the traditional colonial empires, while seeing second-stage movements in new states as threats to international security.

An independence rebellion of this second-stage kind has threatened the political stability of Papua New Guinea ever since secessionist rebels brought copper mining operations at Panguna to a halt in 1989. Myths of Bougainvillean nationhood have competed with myths of Papua New Guinean nationhood. In fact both the island and the country are fractured along linguistic lines, neither is a nation, and political unity would be no more likely in an independent Republic of Meekamui than in Papua New Guinea as a whole, as fighting among Bougainvilleans themselves has shown. Most villagers have suffered at different times under both the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and simply want peace and the restoration of government services, schools, hospitals and public service salaries. Avoidable deaths caused by the withdrawal of services during the blockade by the national government number in the thousands. Whether the Bougainville Transitional Government established in April 1995 will succeed in bringing a lasting peace to the province remains to be seen.<sup>12</sup> The core issue is how much political autonomy the national government can afford to grant Bougainville without encouraging a general disintegration of the Papua New Guinean state, particularly in the form of a breakaway by the New Guinea Islands provinces.<sup>13</sup> Neither the OPM nor the BRA is at all likely to succeed in forming a new state. Both are poorly disciplined organisations without significant external support in the form of money, weapons or even recognition.

Aboriginal Australians, Maori, native Hawai'ians and Kanaks are a second group who favour wider definitions of decolonisation. Australia, New Zealand, Hawai'i and New Caledonia are the four places in the region where settler populations have outnumbered the original inhabitants, taken much of their land and constructed liberal democracies along Western lines. In each of these societies a clash between different principles of political legitimacy lies at the heart of disputes over decolonisation and sovereignty. New Caledonia illustrates the point (see Small, chapter 8). The French authorities organised a referendum on the future of New Caledonia in 1987 and achieved a resounding vote in favour of French rule. But the result, supported by a large majority of those who voted, did not settle the matter. The Kanaks boycotted the referendum. Most Kanaks had lost land and become strangers in their own country. They were too

alienated from the political and economic system to accept a decision based merely on numbers as represented by votes cast in a liberal democratic system: they stood for a different political principle, rights, above all rights to land and sovereignty said to belong by inheritance to the descendants of the original occupiers.

Rights to land have a clear place in the liberal tradition because they are a species of the rights of property so vigorously protected by Western law. Ancient, aboriginal rights to land are embodied in legal instruments such as the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand and were recognised in the High Court of Australia's landmark Mabo decision of 1992. While such rights are politically contested, they can be incorporated into the law of settler societies without difficulty and without calling into question the consistency of that law. Aboriginal Australians, Maoris, Kanaks and native Hawai'ians have all asserted rights to land in recent years and in varying degrees they have all been successful.

Rights to sovereignty are a different matter. The liberal democracies of Australia, New Zealand, France (for the French Pacific territories) and the United States (for Hawai'i) embody a fundamental principle of universality in the way in which political power is legitimated. Citizenship by itself and without reference to ethnicity, descent or original attachment to the land is the sole qualification for participating in the regular elections that confer legitimacy on the government. No doubt these societies are far less democratic than they appear: political power is distributed much less equitably than the ideology of democracy suggests, and wealth and descent are significant prerequisites for exercising such power. But the important point is ideological. Numbers matter because they are believed to matter. Those who assert claims to control the state on a different basis, such as descent from the original occupiers of the land, are not likely to get far unless they also have the numbers in terms of votes.

In most non-settler societies in the Pacific the argument goes the other way. Here Europeans were a tiny minority and most people could claim descent from the original occupiers of the land. So rights to land and sovereignty based on descent went together with numbers. 'Descent from the original occupiers of the land' is synonymous with the nation, is used in a variety of definitions as a qualification for citizenship in several Melanesian countries and qualifies people for the sovereignty that comes with decolonisation. In the absence of large settler populations the two principles, numbers and rights, can be reconciled and can justify the political authority of the post-colonial state.

But where settlers form a large majority, their descendants, not the descendants of the original occupiers, decide which principle legitimates political authority. In Australia, for example, the descendants of European and other foreign settlers are more than 98% of the population, and the special claims of Aboriginal Australians are dealt with by land rights legislation enacted within the conventional political process. The significance of talk about decolonisation in Australia does not lie in that possibility itself but in the political leverage created by such talk, as the Torres Strait Islands show (see Elu, chapter 16, and Mullins, chapter 17). Torres Strait Islanders, who number about 8,500 in the islands and 15,000 on the mainland, have been calling for self-government since the 1980s. They resent the fact that Federal funding comes via the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, an instrumentality which puts them together with Aboriginal Australians. When Prime Minister Paul Keating visited Thursday Island in September 1995, they reminded him that they wanted separate funding and received an encouraging response. By emphasising a distinct ethnic identity, the Torres Strait Islanders hope to garner a greater share of Canberra's resources.<sup>14</sup>

New Zealand's 340,000 Maori represent a larger proportion of their country's total population than do Aboriginal Australians (13% compared with 1.5%), and have successfully brought the issue of Maori self-determination to the mainstream political agenda. In response to Maori pressure, the Labour government strengthened the Waitangi Tribunal in 1985 and opened the way for a flood of Maori land claims going back to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between Maori chiefs and the British in 1840.<sup>15</sup>

Briefly, before the Labour Party was defeated in 1990, the government tried to set up a version of Maori self-determination by delivering services through local tribal authorities, but the National Party has reversed the experiment. From the point of view of most white or pakeha New Zealanders their country was decolonised when it became a self-governing Dominion early this century. But for many Maori the decolonisation of New Zealand remains incomplete.

In the heady atmosphere of protest that followed the New Zealand government's 1994 offer of \$NZ1 billion in settlement of all land claims - the so-called fiscal envelope - some Maori leaders called for sovereignty and an independent Maori nation state. Maori activists disrupted the 1995 celebrations of Waitangi Day on February 6 by baring buttocks, spitting and tearing down the New Zealand flag. Soon afterwards Maoris occupied Moutoa Gardens in the city of Wanganui and in four other sites of Maori land claims. By the end of April a mainly pakeha group of Wanganui citizens were also demonstrating, proclaiming a pakeha version of New Zealand nationhood defined in majoritarian terms, with banners saying 'One Nation, One People' and 'One Law for All People'.<sup>16</sup> The Maori occupations are meant to dramatise dispossession by the invading pakeha population in the nineteenth century, and, in the imaginations of some radicals, to prepare the way for the full decolonisation of New Zealand under Maori control. Ironically, many Maori beliefs about race, culture and nation have a Western intellectual heritage and are pressed into service to achieve Western political goals.

New Zealand will not be 'decolonised' in the conventional sense of the term. It will not become the sovereign state of Aotearoa under Maori domination. The Maori are too small a minority in the country of their ancestors, and few want a Maori nation-state in any case. Yet the resurgence of Maori demands for self-determination has critically influenced the political agenda in New Zealand and will continue to be one of the ways by which a dispossessed minority, held together by a shared sense of history and cultural identity, will bargain for a fairer share of wealth and status in a westernised and capitalist society.

Hawai'i will not be decolonised in the conventional sense either. Like the Maori, Hawai'ians are a dispossessed minority who employ an idiom of decolonisation in defence of claims to land and sovereignty. On 17 January 1993, a hundred years after the overthrow of the monarchy by Americans, 15,000 Hawai'ians marched on 'Iolani Palace in Honolulu shouting slogans such as *Ka Lahui Hawai'i* (the Hawai'ian nation) and *'ea* (sovereignty). The fate of the concept of sovereignty in recent debate in Hawai'i exemplifies the clash between rights-based and numbers-based principles of political legitimacy. A group of international lawyers and academics who constituted the People's International Tribunal called upon the United States and the world in 1993 to 'acknowledge the right of Lahui Kanaka Maoli to decolonize under provision of United Nations Resolution 1514' as if it were possible for Hawai'i to follow the example of non-settler colonies such as Western Samoa and Kiribati and to gain sovereignty in the name of the nation. By this theory, the international community should support Hawai'i in an act of political independence from the colonising power, the United States. The Hawai'ian sovereignty movement *Ka Pakaukau*, which organised the Tribunal, professes to see Hawai'ian independence of this kind as a possibility that belongs to the real world of politics.

The vast majority of American citizens in Hawai'i, many of them native Hawai'ians, do not support such a future or regard it as remotely feasible. In the hands of other Hawai'ian sovereignty groups, such as *Ka Lahui Hawai'i* led by Mililani Trask, sovereignty becomes a more achievable goal embracing reconciliation under an Apology Bill, the return to direct Hawai'ian control of the Hawai'ian Trust Lands and the forming of a 'nation within a nation' on the model of Indian nations in the mainland United States. The goal is redistributive justice for a dispossessed minority within an existing political system. The state government has embraced the rhetoric of sovereignty in order to ensure that it does not mean very much at all, or - to put it another way - to ensure that any entity called a sovereign Hawai'ian government or nation is compatible with the rule of the majority in Hawai'i. There has been talk of a plebiscite on the question of



restoring a Hawaiian nation, whatever attenuated form that might take, but not of one on the question of restoring a Hawaiian state.<sup>17</sup> In liberal political systems with principles of legitimacy based on numbers, minority claims to land might be accepted, but minority claims to sovereignty based on rights will inevitably be resisted. Something given the name sovereignty, if conceded, will be a mere shadow of itself, with almost none of the significance it has in international law, yet with significance of another kind in the restitution of land and new entitlements to resources. Such will be the case in Hawai'i.

New Caledonia represents a variation on the theme of settler colonies. Here history delivered an ambiguous verdict on the territory's future. The original and settler populations are in rough balance. Settlers (French, Vietnamese, Wallisians, Indonesians and others, see Small, chapter 8) outnumber Kanaks, but not by a huge margin. As a consequence, the outcome of the territory's dispute over decolonisation has much less of the predictability that comes from the presence of a large majority of settlers. Australia, Hawai'i and New Zealand do not fit the model of territories that the international community regards as requiring decolonisation. Settlers there have long since overwhelmed original populations and, as far as the world is concerned, the die is cast. New Caledonia, however, is the territory of a European power on the other side of the world and part of an older colonial empire that once included South-East Asian and African states, all of which have achieved independence. The name of its principal independence movement, the FLNKS, recalls the FLN of French Algeria. Above all, the French government considered the FLNKS to be so serious a threat that it despatched thousands of troops to the territory to keep order. When Jean-Marie Tjibaou talked of a national liberation struggle and an independent Republic of Kanaky he was thought not to be posturing for effect but to be describing an achievable goal. For these reasons, and under pressure from the South Pacific Forum, the United Nations voted in 1986 to put New Caledonia on the list of non-self-governing territories. New Caledonia conforms with the internationally recognised paradigm of a colonial territory.

The military raid in which French soldiers killed nineteen Kanaks on Ouvéa in May 1988 spurred the leaders of both sides to reach an agreement, the Matignon Accords, which have become the basis of what Stephen Henningham calls the 'uneasy peace'.<sup>18</sup> The essence of the Accords is that New Caledonia has been given a breathing-space of ten years before the territory's people vote again in a referendum on their political future in 1998, and that the French government has become committed to public spending in the territory on an unprecedented scale. Kanaks in the northern and Islands provinces remain much poorer than French in Nouméa, but they are beginning to benefit from infrastructure of a kind that does not exist anywhere else in Melanesia. This higher standard of living, the French hope, will split the Kanak vote sufficiently in 1998 to ensure a future for the territory as part of overseas France. Under the '400 managers' program, funds are available to give special training to 400 territory residents (the majority Kanak) to assume positions of responsibility in business and the public sector previously denied them. Smartly dressed young Kanaks in new cars can already be seen making their way to business appointments in Nouméa.

France has also made some attempts to redistribute land, for land rights have been at the foundation of the Kanak independence movement since the 1970s. Except in the Loyalty Islands, where most of the land remained in the possession of the original inhabitants, the history of land is like that of Australia. Settlers came, took land and pushed villagers into reserves, and today just 1,000 French own two-thirds of the arable land. The authorities have redistributed some land but a wholesale re-allocation seems unlikely.

As the independence movement splits between those who profit from the French connection and those who want independence, the initiative is moving decisively to the French government. Politics in New Caledonia is losing its polarised, ideological character and, as the 1995 provincial elections showed, the FLNKS is increasingly splintering and drawn into deals and cross-party arrangements. Like its loyalist opponent the RPCR, the FLNKS now accepts that a simple vote on independence in 1998 would be divisive, and that all major groupings need to reach a consensus on the territory's future before a vote of any kind.<sup>19</sup> A

number of outcomes is possible: New Caledonia might follow the example of the former American territories in Micronesia and enter into a status of 'independence-in-association' with France, with some of the cultural benefits of independence and a continuing flow of French aid; or the Matignon Accords might be extended for years before a final referendum. The least likely outcome is that the 1998 referendum will be held in the form originally envisaged, and that the territory will become an independent Melanesian republic.

Fiji is a further variation on the theme of settler colonies, in this case an independent Pacific state with a history of British colonisation and a sizable Indian minority whose numbers have roughly matched or slightly exceeded those of the original Fijians for most of the last fifty years (Lal, chapter 4). Others have pondered the causes of the coup of 1987.<sup>20</sup> Fiji Indians, who were targeted by the coup and whose political representation has since been curtailed, cannot employ the rhetoric of decolonisation in defence of their interests. Unlike disadvantaged minorities almost everywhere else in the region they cannot claim land or sovereignty on the basis of the rights of the original occupiers. That is an argument which in Fiji belongs to the politically dominant Fijians. So like the descendants of settlers in Australia, New Zealand or Hawai'i, the Fiji Indians have appealed to majority rule and race-blind citizenship, liberal democratic ideas which they hope might find a more important place in Fiji's constitution after the current constitutional review. Uniquely among the Pacific's former settler colonies, and for special historical reasons, Fiji is an independent state where rights-based legitimacy has prevailed. Since the 1987 coups the ethnic nationalist argument has appeared in a secessionist form, with calls by some Rotumans for the independence of their homeland, the one Polynesian island group in the country. The call was repeated by a high-ranking Rotuman Gagaj Sau Lagatmaro, in 1995.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Territories**

After more than three decades since the Western Samoans became the first Polynesians to gain independence (Liua'ana, chapter 5), the peoples of the remaining territories in Polynesia and Micronesia are not rushing to follow. Underwritten by subsidies from Washington or Paris, the standard of living is higher in American Samoa, Guam and French Polynesia than in Western Samoa and Tonga. It is higher in Palau or the Marshalls than in Kiribati or Tuvalu, at least as most people measure these things. The territories do better than the freely associated states, which in turn do better than independent states. A direct or indirect connection with a metropolitan power, bringing subsidies and allowing out-migration, gives people more choices than independence with foreign aid. Samoans and Tongans, for example, leave their independent homelands behind in order to enter the non-independent territory of American Samoa, where employers pay higher wages. The paradox of decolonisation in this part of the Pacific is that Islanders want independence most where it will not happen, and least where a genuine possibility exists.

French Polynesia might appear to be an exception. It is a territory with a substantial Islander majority, a history of being used for nuclear tests and a number of independence parties. Media images of Tahiti in September 1995 suggested that French Polynesia was seething with anti-colonial discontent. Following France's decision to resume nuclear testing for a final series in 1995 and 1996, and after sustained international protest which put French Polynesia in the spotlight as never before, the French detonated their first bomb beneath Moruroa lagoon on 5 September. The following day unionists called a general strike which quickly degenerated into a riot. Demonstrators occupied the runway at the international airport at Pape'ete, attacked an Air France DC-10 awaiting takeoff and then stormed the terminal building with bricks, iron bars and even a bulldozer. The riots spread to Pape'ete itself, where youths rampaged through the streets, looting, smashing shop windows and setting buildings alight. As the French authorities flew in extra security forces (including the Foreign Legion) the rest of the world had its first chance to see modern Tahiti. What the world saw was a French colonial town ablaze, cars overturned, stores looted and street

battles between police and young Tahitians. In Australia, an ABC radio journalist reported the riots live against a background of regular stun grenade explosions, and in the print media subeditors chose headlines such as 'Bomb ignites Pacific rebellion', 'French provoke dormant independence movement', 'explosion of independence' and the inevitable 'Rebellion in Paradise'. Oscar Temaru, leader of the independence party Tavini Huiraatira, was quoted as saying: 'Today you can hear the French firing on our people...At this very moment we appeal to the entire world to call on Jacques Chirac to stop this madness...The whole people of this country are there fighting against the French army. It is a decision made by the people themselves.' International journalists queued eight deep to interview Temaru, whom they portrayed as a Polynesian Nelson Mandela.<sup>22</sup>

Despite these dramatic events, French Polynesia will probably remain part of overseas France, well into the next century. The territory is not an equivalent of Vietnam or Algeria in the 1950s, and the riots are unlikely to be the first steps on French Polynesia's march to independence. A majority of the rioters and looters appear to have been unemployed youths from the poorest parts of Pape'ete, venting their anger at their relegation to the bottom of the social pile. They are not the shock-troops of a disciplined and widely supported movement for independence. In fact, many other Polynesians make sharp distinctions between opposing nuclear testing and opposing the French presence as a whole. A majority of the thousands who marched in a protest around the island of Tahiti in June 1995 wanted an end to testing but not an end to French rule.

The territory's income, after all, fell sharply when the nuclear tests were suspended in 1992. The French government recognised that the French Polynesian economy required a long term solution founded on more than military francs. The result was an agreement in 1994 providing for continued development funds until 2003. This is the Pact for Progress, based in part on a Development Charter drawn up by leading figures in French Polynesia soon after the suspension of the tests, when the need for French Polynesia to generate more wealth became starkly apparent.<sup>23</sup> During the years of nuclear testing (1966-1992) the French Polynesian independence movement in its different manifestations was constantly hampered by the fact that the French testing centre brought money to the territory, underwriting the livelihoods of thousands of Islanders who were understandably reluctant to call for France to leave. Now it is hampered by the Pact for Progress, a less generous subsidy but a guarantee that France will continue to develop the territory. In these circumstances the 1995 riots are more likely to weaken the broad political appeal of Tavini Huiraatira than to strengthen it.

French Polynesia has an 'economy of transfer', where money comes from far away in return for strategic services. In Bernard Poirine's formulation, an economy of transfer is one version of a wider phenomenon of 'economies of rent', and in this case the rent is for nuclear purposes.<sup>24</sup> Territorial politics, as Karin von Stokirch has argued, operates on the basis of widespread patronage networks, in which jobs, services and property routinely change hands in return for votes, and which is ultimately underwritten by financial transfers from France and by the lack of 'hard budget constraints'. An artificial economy, built on the patronage of an external power which values the territory for strategic reasons, thus becomes the conduit for patronage at lower levels, territorial and municipal. Financial responsibility is lacking, political allegiances tend to be flexible and wider ideological considerations have traditionally played a small part in politics.<sup>25</sup>

French Polynesia shows that, however much people might want to reassert their cultural identity in a decolonised setting, they fear the loss of a generous patron more. The American territory of Guam exemplifies a similar phenomenon in a different way. Here independence is so remote a possibility that politicians can employ the stirring rhetoric of decolonisation without any fear that it might occur. In Guam most talk of decolonisation is strictly for non-decolonising purposes. Representatives of Guam have appeared in recent years before the United Nations Decolonisation Committee and the Subcommittee on

Small Territories, complaining of U.S. imperialism. When Joseph Ada introduced himself to the Clinton administration at the White House in 1993, he said he came as 'Governor of the American colony of Guam' and that Guam was 'unwilling to remain a colony'.<sup>26</sup> Guam, he said, was like the thirteen colonies under the British in the eighteenth century. The implication might seem to be that Guam wants to sever ties with Washington and become independent. Yet in fact the Chamorro self-determination movement, at least in its widely supported form, seeks merely an alternative form of connection with the United States - as a Commonwealth rather than an unincorporated territory. American citizenship, that envied resource endowment which Guamanians have had since 1950, is not to be put at risk, and the calculation is that lands will be restored to Chamorros while federal funding continues to flow from Washington. Republican control of both houses of Congress has stalled progress towards Commonwealth status for Guam. The whole issue may well be submerged for years by other issues such as the closure of military facilities and cutbacks in federal funding.<sup>27</sup>

## Reflections

Certain general conclusions suggest themselves. First, decolonisation is an ideological as well as a political phenomenon. It is the mechanism of forming new states, and is everywhere accompanied by new beliefs of Western origin about political legitimacy and the justification of authority. The new states of the Pacific are supposed to be 'nation-states' along Western lines, legitimated in Western ways. Applied to widely different cultural and political circumstances across the region, this formula provides a foundation for political stability in some Pacific countries but a recipe for secession and civil strife in others.

Second, 'decolonisation' is a contested concept. Whether or not a territory deserves to be decolonised and whether or not a people deserve to be sovereign are not decided simply by reference to international law and U.N. resolutions; they are matters of opinion. Whereas the French authorities conceive of French Polynesia as naturally part of France, for example, the independence activists think of it as naturally an independent country, held back from its destiny by foreign occupation.

Third, the language of decolonisation and national freedom now serves a disparate array of anti-colonial, secessionist and sovereignty movements, some of which regard independence as catastrophic.

Fourth, none of the anti-colonial and secessionist movements is likely to achieve decolonisation in the traditional sense.

Fifth, rights-based arguments for land are being accepted in liberal democracies in the Pacific but, because the legitimating principle for political authority in such societies is majoritarian, minorities there will not succeed with rights-based arguments for sovereignty in its classic sense of independent statehood. 'Sovereignty' may come to minorities but only in an attenuated form, principally as a fairer share of resources - especially land - and greater freedom of cultural expression. For some sovereignty movements, this will represent a partial realisation of their original aims, which did not include independence anyway.

Sixth, many Islanders no longer want to be decolonised. The high tide of decolonisation in the non-settler Pacific Islands has receded. One reason lies in international politics. So long as powerful external states wanted Pacific Islands decolonisation, it happened; now that the international community regards decolonisation as virtually accomplished, the Islands' political map is likely to remain unaltered. But another reason is that the distinction between colonial territories and independent or semi-independent states is becoming blurred. Pacific Islanders have better lives and access to more services in most of the region's territories than they do in independent countries. In territories such as French Polynesia, American Samoa and Guam, as well as Hawai'i, a decisive majority of Islanders want to remain firmly tied to the

metropolitan patron that is the source of their standard of living and would regard decolonisation as a disaster.

What is left behind in this post-colonial and post-decolonial era differs from place to place. In parts of Melanesia secessionism continues to inspire armed conflict. In island groups long since overwhelmed by settlers descendants of the first occupiers call for land and sovereignty in the name of decolonisation. In most of the remaining territories the majority of Islanders are wary of what they suspect is the false promise of independence. The path to independence for colonial peoples used to be seen as the march of history, temporarily delayed in some territories but ultimately inevitable. From the perspective of the 1990s, this particular march of history begins to look like an artefact of a period and set of circumstances, and decolonisation has lost its simple teleology. While the rhetoric of decolonisation expands and diversifies, the reality diminishes.

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## Queen Sālote and the British Dual Mandate Policy

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Dual mandate as a policy could be seen in operation in Tonga in the early years of the reign of Queen Sālote Tupou III, who succeeded her father, Tupou II, on 5 April 1918, three weeks after her eighteenth birthday. Islay McOwan, British Agent & Consul 1917-27, initially had grave doubts about Sālote's ability to rule, saying, 'The Queen is very young and inexperienced and is incapable, in my judgment, of discharging the duties devolving upon her'. He deplored 'Her Majesty's inability to distinguish between good and bad advice where the interests of the Kingdom are concerned', and suggested this (April 1918) was an appropriate time to change Tonga's status.<sup>1</sup> Annexation was not a new idea, as it had been considered several times during the reign of Tupou II, along with deportation of that monarch.

The British at first had so little faith in Sālote that they planned to have her consort, Tungī Mailefihi, crowned King at the same time as Sālote was crowned Queen, and to make him the effective ruler. By an accident of war, Colonial Office consent to this proposal was lost at sea, the replacement message arriving a few days after Sālote's coronation in October 1918.<sup>2</sup> The British then gave Sālote an opportunity to prove herself, and thereafter constantly evaluated her effectiveness as a 'native ruler'. They preferred the dual mandate (in which a 'native ruler' would be guided by an Agent & Consul) to annexation and government by an administrator, because the former was the more economic way to control Tonga.

Within a few weeks of Queen Sālote's accession McOwan reported that 'consultations which I have had with Her Majesty and Uiliami Tungī have been marked by the good feeling and the good sense of both',<sup>3</sup> but he regretted that the Queen could not control Parliament, which was the most visible (although largely ineffective) instrument of government. Parliament would be dominated for some years by dissident chiefs, who used it to express their opposition to the Tupou dynasty, of which Queen Sālote was only the third national leader. In 1920 McOwan reported to the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific that:

*The Queen has not the influence over these men [members of Parliament] that her late father possessed [but] I am glad to say that neither Her Majesty nor her consort seek to obtain that influence by resorting to methods which would be derogatory to their rank, to their dignity and to the respect in which they are held by all classes of the community.*<sup>4</sup>

When the High Commissioner, Sir Cecil Rodwell, visited Tonga in November 1920, he found Parliament out of control, impeaching ministers and refusing to conduct business until the Queen had responded to a petition from the previous session. Rodwell informed the members of Parliament that if they could not find common ground with the Queen and Privy Council, he would recommend to the Secretary of State for the Colonies that the existing status of Tonga be reconsidered.<sup>5</sup> Rodwell's subsequent correspondence with the Colonial Office shows that what he had in mind was the annexation of Tonga.

This was no empty threat. In earlier crises, Britain had threatened to depose and deport Tupou II, and the High Commissioner actually had deported two premiers (1890 and 1905). Tupou II had been given more than one chance to reform himself and his government. Sālote needed only one chance, for McOwan soon had further opportunities to observe Sālote's good feeling and good sense, and to note that one of her outstanding qualities was her ability to distinguish good from bad advice.

Sālote needed the British alliance because of her difficulties with the rebellious chiefs. She was not only meticulous in observing Tonga's Treaty of Friendship with Great Britain (1900) and the Supplementary Agreement (1905), but also in seeking and acting upon the advice of the Agent & Consul and the High Commissioner. Sālote was wholly sincere when she commented that 'The Friendship of Great Britain

is Tonga's dearest possession'<sup>6</sup>, for she, like McOwan, genuinely believed that Tonga's interests - as well as her own - were best served by the British alliance.

The High Commissioner was largely guided by McOwan's assessment, just as the Colonial Office was guided by the High Commissioner. McOwan was soon deeply committed to the Queen, most notably when dissident chiefs opposed the royal house over the Church Reunion difficulties of 1923-24. The outcome was very significant for Tonga, for the High Commissioner agreed that the Privy Council would be the final court of appeal in the legal cases arising from Church Reunion, and this ruling gave Tonga legal independence and greatly increased the likelihood of Sālote's survival as 'native ruler'.

That Sālote understood the dual mandate policy was demonstrated in a speech at the Opening of Parliament in 1925, in which she informed the members of Parliament:

*If we are wise and work faithfully and well, what can restrict our freedom or our increasing happiness? I speak freely and confidently, for the obvious desire of Great Britain in these days is to deal kindly with those countries over which she exercises protection if they continue to administer their affairs justly and well and exercise wisdom in maintaining peace and increasing the national well-being. In such circumstances she will respect and protect their freedom.*

British support for the Queen was declared publicly very soon after this speech, during an August 1925 visit by the new High Commissioner, Sir Eyre Hutson. Hutson listened to a deputation of dissident chiefs, but gave them no encouragement. Unlike 1920, there was no talk of deportations or annexation, Hutson not only assured the Queen that she had won the wholehearted confidence of the British government, but spelt out the very personal nature of the partnership: Sālote and her British advisers rather than government-to-government.

*I desire to assure Your Majesty in person . . . that His [Britannic] Majesty's Government desire no departure from the understandings reached with regard to relations between Your Majesty's Government and the British Agent & Consul and the High Commissioner. Further, I have to assure Your Majesty that the aim of His Majesty the King, and of His Government is one of goodwill towards Tonga; and an earnest desire to see your Kingdom continue to prosper under your wise and good Government, and by the continuance of advice to assist in promoting the contentment and happiness of your people.<sup>7</sup> (my emphasis)*

In turn, at a public function in his honour, Hutson was thanked for the benefits Britain's advice and protection had brought to Tonga. In his subsequent report to the Colonial Office Hutson emphasised the personal qualities of the Queen and the personal nature of her rule.

*[the Queen] expressed to me [in a private interview] her deep appreciation of the assistance and advice rendered to her by His Majesty's Government. I was deeply impressed with her personality, she is only twenty-five years of age: but she displays great dignity in her position, has acquired an intimate knowledge of native customs and traditions, and she undoubtedly commands the respect of the people.<sup>8</sup>*

Queen Sālote silently used Hutson's visit to her advantage for she took the highly unusual step of inviting Hutson to sit in the ceremonial circle of the *taumafa kava* over which she presided. It was a delicate compliment to Hutson, but, more importantly, a sign to all Tongans that he recognised her legitimacy.

The year 1925 was thus a most significant one in Queen Sālote's reign. Thereafter the areas of British responsibility were fairly clearly defined, but Sālote's less so. Both parties were content that the British advised on matters relating to external relations, the administration, finance, and foreigners residing in the kingdom, leaving the Queen to govern the people through 'influence'. Unfortunately for us, while the British-influenced areas of government were fully documented, the Queen's rule was largely unrecorded, being conducted face to face, when her 'intimate knowledge of native customs and



traditions' was fully used to rule the chiefs and people. She also used the church - especially the Free Wesleyan Church - as a means of privately conveying her wishes to chiefs and people over the heads of the would-be-independent chiefs.

'Unity and peace', which Sālote so frequently mentioned in her speeches as what she most desired for Tonga, were also greatly desired by her British advisers. In order to gain 'unity and peace' Queen Sālote was happy to share power with the British and with her consort, Tungī (who was Premier from 1923), although not with the other chiefs of Tonga. Indeed the British alliance had benefits for Sālote that she did not publicise. The Tongan chiefs, impressed by British confidence in Sālote, responded by increasing respect for her; while the British were impressed by her ability to win over chiefly support and found it convenient to ignore the steadily decreasing number of dissident voices.

In her reign of 47 years the Queen saw a number of Agent & Consuls and High Commissioners come and go. Not all had a full understanding of the delicate balance required in maintaining political responsibilities. J. S. Neill (who succeeded McOwan as Agent & Consul in January 1927), for example, urged Sālote to allow the Parliament of Tonga a greater role in government. By this time (the 1930s) the Queen and Tungī felt quite comfortable about quietly but firmly ignoring this advice.

With sympathetic British advisers, Queen Sālote's policies were very effectively promoted, whether the advisers understood them or not. She was gracious when the British refused her requests or failed to recognise the traditional rights and prerogatives that her ancestors had exercised as her own. She took a long-term view of issues and, instead of protesting, often won her point through patience. For example, in 1939 the Queen asked for the removal of a Chief Justice the Colonial Office has selected for Tonga. Her request was refused. When she repeated the request in 1940 the Colonial Office agreed, for the High Commissioner advised the Colonial Office to remove the official 'in the interests of good relations, especially in view of the extremely helpful and loyal attitude of that Kingdom in connexion with the war'.<sup>9</sup>

The Queen often expressed her gratitude for British protection of Tonga, and this gratitude was amply demonstrated during World War Two. Tonga's contribution to the war was outstanding in view of her small population (33,000 in 1939). Money was raised to buy four spitfires for Great Britain. There were substantial donations to Red Cross and other wartime funds, and a commando unit of the Tonga Defence Force was sent to fight in the Solomons. As well as giving money and being a very active patron of wartime organisations, the Queen made available from the royal estates 546 acres of land at a peppercorn rent for use as an airfield by the RNZAF and the US forces.

After the war, the mythology of the universally beloved Queen was dominant, and it would have been politically incorrect for either Tongan or foreigner to criticise her. Although she fostered the idea that she was unchallengeable by virtue of descent and legitimate succession, she had in fact *earned* this status by proving herself an effective 'native ruler' *par excellence*. The welcome she received in the Great Britain at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 *began* with official recognition of her positive relationship with the protecting power *before* it progressed to personal popularity.

When, in the early 1950s, Parliament suggested (largely at the instigation of the Crown Prince) that the time had come for the Treaty of Friendship to be amended to give Tonga greater financial independence, the Queen suggested that the British Government should appear to be the prime mover. It fitted her own idea of the benevolent relationship that Britain should itself recognise Tonga's changed status. The revised Treaty was signed by the Queen in 1958. It would not be until 1970, five years after her death, that the Treaty was revised to make Tonga independent and a full member of the British Commonwealth.

To her chiefs and people Queen Sālote always emphasised the benefits of the British alliance, never the drawbacks. She also described as being for the advantage to the kingdom, never to herself and her dynasty (as was the case). The exception was the bestowal of British honours upon herself, to which she gave maximum publicity. The first three awards - DBE 1932, GBE 1945, GCVO 1953 - were

occasions for national celebrations in Tonga. And shortly before Queen Sālote's death, on 16 December 1965, Queen Elizabeth II again recognised her loyalty to the British alliance by awarding her the GCMG. These four British honours were carried by two princes of the royal house in the funeral procession, alongside the mats and *tapa* that confirmed the wealth and pre-eminence of the royal house so personally secured by Queen Sālote of Tonga.

1. Islay McOwan to High Commissioner for the Western Pacific (HC), 12 April 1918, Western Pacific High Commission: General Correspondence Inwards (WPHC:GCI) 1016/18.
2. *Ibid.*; Secretary of State for the Colonies (SofSCol.) to HC, 18 July 1918, HC to McOwan, 21 Oct. 1918, British Consul, Tonga (BCT) 1/43/85; Western Pacific High Commission to Agent & Consul, vol. 1918.
3. McOwan to HC, 14 May 1918, BCT 1/19.
4. McOwan to HC, 6 December 1920, WPHC:GCI 3116/20.
5. 'Notes of interview between the High Commissioner and representative Nobles and members of the Legislative Assembly', in McOwan to HC, 6 December 1920, WPHC:GCI 3116/20.
6. Queen Sālote's speech at the Opening of Parliament, 13 June 1922, *Tonga Government Gazette* 20 (13 July 1922) 93.
7. IIC to Sālote, recorded in 'Notes of Interview', 6 August 1925, Colonial Office Confidential Paper *Western Pacific* 3, enclosure in item 25.
8. HC to SofSCol., 13 August 1925, *ibid.*, item 25.
9. IIC to SofSCol., 15 August 1940, WPHC 170(S)39.



Queries - Prasad and Kurland

May we change title to 'Arrival of New Diseases on Guam: lines of evidence suggesting the post-Spanish origins of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and Parkinson's dementia

fn 17 Heathcote, pers. comm - initial of Heathcote and Loerzel

What are Surahanos and Surahanas - healers?

What is IHD

fn 11 Marler, pers. comm. - initial please.

fn 26 - Annual Reports etc - is this published?

fn 29 - Proceedings Staff Meeting - published?

## The Decolonisation of Fiji: Debate on Constitutional Change, 1943-1963

Brij V. Lal, ANU

Fiji became independent on 10 October 1970, eight years after Western Samoa, five years after the Cook Islands shed their colonial tutelage and two years after Nauru ended its trusteeship.<sup>1</sup> At one level, the Fijian story exhibits the familiar Pacific patterns of peaceful, negotiated and constitutional independence, with warm and intact links to the ex-imperial power. But the Fijian experience also tells a different story, of an island nation in (but not always of) the Pacific, distinguished from its neighbours by its multiethnic demography and complex mix of communal politics, the peculiar character of its colonial administration, a racially-segregated system of electoral representation, the size and sophistication of its economic base, and its dominant role in regional affairs. In the Pacific, Fiji is *sui generis*.

Unlike most Pacific islands, Fiji enjoyed a semblance of elected government from early this century, yet it achieved independence much later than several of them. This chapter seeks to explore this paradox. The sometimes useful 'coloniser versus colonised' model or the dichotomous 'pushed out or pulling out' scenario, attractive in some other Pacific contexts, have limited explanatory value for Fiji. A better understanding of Fiji's late independence comes from examining three related sets of variables peculiar to Fiji: the competing (and sometimes incompatible) political demands and aspirations of Fiji's three main communities, Fijians, Indo-Fijians and Europeans; the approach of the colonial administration in dealing with these political interests; and the overarching influence of the Colonial Office in formulating policy and adjudicating disputes.

The two dates which enclose this chapter are significant. 1943 saw the first of many post-war debates on the constitution, demanding more autonomy and greater self-government. None came to fruition, not necessarily because the colonial administration dithered; on several occasions it sought to initiate debate with a view to changing the status quo. The failure had more to do with the entrenched position of the Fijian and European communities which regarded even the mildest reform as a threat to their privileged positions. Exhausted orthodoxies and old habits of thought were powerful brakes on change. 1963 marks a kind of turning point in the debate. The issue after that year was no longer *whether* Fiji should gain a greater degree of self government, and possibly independence eventually. The thrust of the debate shifted to the *terms and conditions* on which independence or a measure of self government would be acceptable to the people of Fiji, in particular to indigenous Fijians.

In 1963, the structure and composition of the Legislative and Executive Councils had remained unchanged for a quarter of a century. Fiji was governed by the Letters Patent of 1937 which provided for a limited adult male, property and literacy based franchise, a communal (racial) system of voting, a partially elected and partially nominated Legislative Council, the dominance of the Executive Council over the Legislative Council, the numerical superiority of official over unofficial members and, most important, the controlling (veto) power of the Governor which he (never she) exercised with the sanction of the Colonial Office. The Legislative Council comprised 18 official members (heads of departments) and 15 unofficial members, five each from the three main communities. Three each of the Indo-Fijian and European members were elected and two nominated by the Governor, while all the five Fijians were nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs and appointed by the Governor. In short, the colonial political system was closed and racially compartmentalised.<sup>2</sup>

This arrangement was frequently questioned in the post-war years to make the political structure reflect more accurately the demographic, social and economic changes sweeping Fiji, as well as the Colonial

Office's commitment to gradual self government in the colonies. Specifically, advocates of constitutional change wanted the system of nomination abolished and peoples' elected representatives to be more involved in formulating policy. It is interesting that the debate on constitutional reform after the war was initiated not by Indian but by European leaders. The main period of Indo-Fijian political agitation had ended by the mid-1930s.<sup>3</sup> Their demand for equal political status on the basis of a common roll defeated, the Indo-Fijian community was resigned to working within the system. With one exception, Indo-Fijian leaders supported, but did not initiate, constitutional debate. Fijian leaders for their part firmly opposed any substantive change to the constitution or any (perceived) dilution of their cherished links to the British Monarchy enshrined in the Deed of Cession, which sealed the Fijian chiefs' cession of their islands to the United Kingdom in 1874.

The first post-war debate took place in 1943, when Alport Barker, elected European member of the Legislative Council, moved to abolish nomination in favour of election, and increase the unofficial members from five to six for each of the three main communities, giving them dominance in the Legislative Council.<sup>4</sup> Following a debate along predictable lines, Barker withdrew his motion once the Governor promised to appoint a select committee to investigate the issue. Nothing happened. Fiji was engaged in the Pacific War, and the sugar industry was embroiled in a major industrial dispute. The fact that the leading Fijian member (Ratu George Toganivalu) had opposed the motion did not help Barker's cause. Two years later, however, with the war over and the industrial front calm, the issue of constitutional reform was raised again, this time by Harold Gibson, another elected European member. Gibson moved to amend the 1937 Letters Patent 'to increase the number of elected representation of the people so that a significant measure of control may be exercised over the raising and spending of [the] comparatively huge sums of money which the people of the Colony will be called upon to provide.'<sup>5</sup> He proposed a 28 member Council of 18 unofficial members elected from communal rolls, and ten nominated official members which would include seven chosen by the Governor to represent special interests. Gibson argued that many of the 'gravely disappointed' public wanted more say in financial matters. 'It is the feeling of the public that there are not sufficient elected representatives either to voice the opinions of the people or to vote on the matters brought forward.' The motion was defeated for reasons discussed below.

Three years later, Amie Ragg, another elected European member, moved yet another motion for an expanded Legislative Council 'in view of the increasing population of the Colony and the advances made in the social, educational and economic spheres by its peoples.'<sup>6</sup> Ragg's Council would consist of six nominated members and four ex-officio members, and 18 elected members, six from each main community. There would be no nominated members in the Legislative Council. The Fijian people would enjoy the same right as other communities of electing their own representatives directly rather than through the Council of Chiefs. For the Executive Council, Ragg proposed, in addition to the four ex-officio members, the inclusion of three members chosen by the Governor from a panel of six submitted by the elected members of the Legislative Council and one nominated member chosen by the Governor to represent special interests.

Ragg proposed to pursue constitutional reform in a 'vigorous and realistic manner', not in 'a dilettante manner, and approached from an academic point of view'. As president of the newly formed European Electors Association, he claimed authority to speak, although his petition to the Colonial Office had been rejected in 1948. His case for expanding the number of elected representatives was familiar. The official majority in the Legislative Council simply preserved 'dictatorship and obstruct[ed] the attainment of the people's legitimate political demands.' He wanted 'a change that will give the people of this Colony a greater say in their own affairs'.

A radical aspect of Ragg's proposal was the extension of the franchise to Fijians. He deplored the 'archaic control' of the Fijian Administration, rejuvenated under Ratu Sukuna's guidance in 1944, because that system gave the government 'an easy way of controlling the Fijians and to appear to give them control of their own affairs'.<sup>7</sup> The system bolstered the chiefs who feared that 'any departure from it will weaken their power and impair their privileges'. Ragg, in short, wanted to emancipate Fijians

from a system 'which is barbaric in origin and outmoded in time'. If continued, he predicted, it would 'lead to their domination and ultimate elimination by other races'. A dose of democracy would do the Fijians good, give them 'character' and 'manly qualities' which they lacked: 'Courage, honour, firmness, pure ambition, truthfulness, usefulness - these and kindred qualities are all too rare.'<sup>8</sup>

Ragg's motion provoked heated debate. The official members did not take part, just as they had abstained on the two previous occasions. The government was unimpressed with Ragg - a 'windy and misguided radical'<sup>9</sup> - but was itself considering enlarging the franchise by reducing property qualifications, and abolishing the system of nomination. But anticipating an acrimonious impasse, and hoping for some future compromise, the government persuaded Ragg to withdraw his motion and refer it to a select committee. Ragg agreed, and was rewarded with the chairmanship of a select committee to investigate his motion. That committee produced its (divided) report in 1949.<sup>10</sup> The report was a 'disappointing document devoid of any constructive proposals', Governor Freeston informed London. It was an accurate assessment. '*Parturiunt montes noscitur ridiculus mus*', agreed Sir John Shockburgh of the Colonial Office.<sup>11</sup> The select committee majority recommended that the official majority be retained, that all European and Indian members be elected from communal rolls and the Great Council of Chiefs elect its own representatives rather than the governor choosing them from a list presented by the chiefs. But in the debate, only the first of the three recommendations passed.

European resistance was rooted in several factors. The system preserved their privileged position. In 1946, in a total population of 259,638, Europeans numbered 4,594 (and Part-Europeans 6,142), Fijians 118,070, and Indo-Fijian 120,414. A tiny minority, Europeans enjoyed parity of representation, a situation which could be jeopardised in new arrangements. Parity would have to be argued for and not assumed, for not everyone agreed that Europeans had the right to it. Sir Charles Jefferies of the Colonial Office, for example, suggested in 1947 that while Indo-Fijians and Fijians should each have five members in the Legislative Council, the European number could be reduced to three.<sup>12</sup> Europeans also feared that, despite their assurances, the Indo-Fijian leaders would use even the minutest reforms to push for a common roll (one person, one vote, one value), which would lead, in view of their increasing numbers, to eventual Indian domination. That eventuality - indeed 'any change whatsoever in our present political set up' - Maurice Scott told Secretary of State for the Colonies Lennox Boyd in 1955, he would 'resist to the bitter end'.<sup>13</sup> Self interest was not their main motivation, Europeans argued. As members of the British 'race', as trustees of the Deed of Cession, it was their sacred duty to safeguard the Fijian 'race' from the Indo-Fijians, and indeed from themselves, like parents protecting children. But that was not the full story. An unspoken but real fear of being swamped by Part-Europeans, who already outnumbered Europeans, and who shared the same communal roll, stiffened European resistance to change.<sup>14</sup> Nomination guaranteed them representation while an elective system opened the contest to fraught consequences. The fear of Part-European domination lay deeply buried in the political subconscious of the European leaders.

Fijian responses were short, effective and unequivocal: no change. Ratu George Toganivalu asked: 'Why change the system of government when that system is working satisfactorily?'<sup>15</sup> Ratu Tiale Vuiyasawa was more pointed. He thought Ragg was in some kind of trance, with a simple mantra 'Change the Letters Patent, change the constitution, and all will be well.' His own people were not ready for change. Joeli Ravai opposed the motion on the grounds that a more democratic system of government 'does not yet suit the Fijian taste', a point also stressed by Ratu Sukuna, who thought his people were 'easily led astray by glowing statements and fine promises', 'a sentimental people intensely loyal to those who have won their trust'.<sup>16</sup> Ratu George Tuisawau thought Ragg's suggestion of universal franchise for the Fijian people 'open to abuse and corruption because there is nothing to prevent undesirable members of my race from standing for election and, when they succeed, playing fast and loose with Fijian politics to the detriment of my race'. Chiefs were the natural leaders, and it was un-Fijian to trust critical decisions to commoners. The revamping of the Fijian Administration had shored up the traditional order, and chiefs would hardly agree to its dilution. Chiefly opposition would remain strong and unwavering, but the next decade would witness the emergence of dissent among

commoners and others not of the Fijian establishment, aspiring to a greater say in managing their affairs.

The fear of Indo-Fijian domination also influenced Fijian thinking. The rapid increase in the Indo-Fijian population, now for the first time exceeding their own, raised doubts about their place in the land of their forefathers, and all the promises of protection the British government had made over the years. The sugar strike of 1943 and the Indo-Fijian war effort, or lack of it, were fresh in Fijian minds. Fijian leaders echoed the European view that any constitutional reform would open the way for a common roll. As Ratu Edward Cakobau put it in 1945, 'The only thing that can stop it [common roll] would be to hold on to our present constitution. The Fijians have every confidence in the Crown and we look to the Europeans, whom we have always supported, to ponder and not to give way too easily to democratic ideals that are unsuited to a country containing three major races who differ in language, culture and religion; these races will never combine to unite as one people'. Fijian opinion found its fullest expression in resolutions passed by the Fijian Affairs Board expressing alarm at the 'inroads now being made by the Indians of the Colony into the Fijian life', the influence they were exerting on the 'everyday life of the Fijians', and their dominance in the economic life of the colony. The Board asked the Colonial Office to protect Fijians from Indo-Fijian domination and to 'adopt a firm attitude towards the Indians in order that the interests of the Fijian race remain pre-eminent in the Colony'.<sup>17</sup> For good measure, the chiefs asked the Colonial Office to forward the resolution to Buckingham Palace.

Indo-Fijian leaders supported the principle of constitutional reform moved by Europeans, but rejected the extraneous material Ragg and others often adduced in support of their argument.<sup>18</sup> AD Patel reaffirmed that the Indo-Fijian community did not question the paramountcy of Fijian interests, nor the view that 'the rights and privileges of the minorities ought not to be and must not be an iota less than the rights and privileges enjoyed by the majority'. Nonetheless, minority communities had 'also to appreciate and realise the fact that the you cannot expect or hope for privileges and rights in excess of those enjoyed by the majority'. He argued for abolition of the official majority and the introduction of universal franchise. Common roll, he argued, as he had argued since the late 1920s and as he would do throughout his life, was the only way forward, the only way 'a common denominator of political outlook will be developed'. But he also agreed that a common roll could not be introduced unless everyone agreed. Patel expressed views widely shared in the Indo-Fijian community, but there were important pockets within it which disagreed, and often sided with the opponents of change. The most vocal were the Muslims.

Muslims came to Fiji as indentured immigrants, and experienced the same challenges and hardships as other Indo-Fijians.<sup>19</sup> Relations between them and Hindus were cordial and cooperative during indenture, but tensions developed as the Indo-Fijian community began to develop and diversify, and as different religious and cultural groups searched for a separate and distinct identity. In 1926, the Fiji Muslim League was formed as the umbrella organisation of all (but in practice mainly Sunni) Muslims. In the 1930s, with explicit support from, indeed at the instigation of, Governor Fletcher, who was determined to break the Indo-Fijian demand for a common roll, the Muslims demanded separate communal representation. The Muslim view was, and in some quarters remains, that they were a separate ethnic community, distinct from Hindus in culture, language, religion and history. The Colonial Office and the Government of India both opposed this demand as divisive and contrary to official policy, but in practice one of the two Indo-Fijian nominated members in the Legislative Council after 1937 was always a Muslim.<sup>20</sup> Muslims, who numbered about 20,000 (eight percent of the total population) in the late 1940s, supported nomination only so long as there was no separate Muslim seat, but their preference was for a fully elective system once their claim was recognised. The Indo-Fijian members of the Legislative Council opposed the Muslim demand for reasons that have become familiar. Separate representation for Muslims would compound divisions in an already severely divided society. Muslims were not an ethnic but a religious group. The social and economic interests of the Hindus and Muslims were essentially identical. Muslims could be elected from Indo-Fijian rolls provided they stood



as Indo-Fijians and not as Muslim separatists. However, Muslim separatists sometimes received unexpected, if self-serving, support from non-Muslim quarters. Among them was Hugh Ragg. But when AD Patel put him on the spot by proposing that Muslims have the same number of seats as other communities, including Europeans, who after all numbered only 5,000, Ragg changed tune and voted against the very idea he had supported a few hours before.

But the Muslim demand, at least as represented by a section of the Fiji Muslim League - not all wanted separate seats, then or now - would not go away. Muslim leaders continued to make representations to the colonial government and even to the Colonial Office throughout the 1950s and the 1960s. In 1951, to gain their support against the nomination system, Vishnu Deo told the visiting Secretary of State John Dugdale that he would agree to a single seat for Muslims to be elected by themselves. The colonial government was taken aback by Deo's support for an idea he had opposed so strenuously, but the Muslim representative AR Sahu Khan, leader of the Muslim Association, overplayed his hand and demanded not only *separate* but *equal* representation.<sup>21</sup> That prospect was always unrealistic. Some in the Colonial Office were sympathetic to the Muslim plea, if only to divide the Indo-Fijians further and weaken their common roll cause, but Governor Garvey opposed further fragmentation. If Muslims received separate representation, he told the Colonial Office, that should be done through informal arrangements, rather than constitutional entrenchment. In Garvey's view, 'if political representation were to be based on religious and cultural grounds the constitution of the Legislative Council would become unworkably fragmented'. This was an argument that the Colonial Office accepted. Garvey argued that apart from Muslims themselves, 'there is no support for separate Muslim representation, and I do not recommend that their repeated requests should be acceded to. The Indo-Fijians wish them to identify themselves as Indo-Fijians, and the Indian Association has informed me that if the number of elected seats were increased a working arrangement would be come to whereby one seat would be reserved to Muslim candidates'.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the 1950s, the prospect of separate representation had dimmed, but the issue would continue to be raised at all conferences and enquiries.

Lack of consensus about the pace and direction of change suited the government perfectly, placing it in the happy position of not having to take a stand or propose initiatives on a contentious issue. Privately, though, its views were divided. Among many, there was sympathy for the Fijian position and a marked lack of it for the Indo-Fijians. As Governor Freestone told the Colonial Office in 1949, 'even after a studied attempt to be initially neutral one finds one's ire rising when [the Indo-Fijians] start pulling strings in India, UNO [United Nations Organisation] and the rest to gain their ends whereas the poor "dumb" Fijian just places his trust wholly in the British officer and abides his judgement. Add to this the extreme likeableness of the Fijian and the difficulty of getting to know the Indian and it is obvious that only by a calculated effort can our efforts remain neutral.'<sup>23</sup> The government never did realise that its own record in dealing with the Indo-Fijians might be a reason why that community sought support outside the colony. The Fijians had the Deed of Cession and the Europeans their supporters in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The Indo-Fijian community had no option but to turn to India - because of India's opposition the indenture system was abolished, India had been instrumental in obtaining the franchise for Indo-Fijians in the 1920s, India had blocked Fletcher's plans in the 1930s to fragment the Indo-Fijian community and abolish elections altogether. Unfortunately for the Indo-Fijians, India cared less and less about overseas Indians after it became independent in 1947.

There was an 'Indian problem', many colonial administrators agreed, but as Governor Grantham told the Colonial Office in 1946, 'apart from the relative growth in population, it might be better termed the Fijian problem, since it is rather a question of raising the Fijian so that he is able to hold his own with the Indian in the modern world, than of holding back the Indian so that he does not outstrip the more easy-going Fijian.'<sup>24</sup> Fijian interests should be protected, the Commissioner of Labour had told the Legislative Council in 1946, but the Fijians had 'reciprocal obligations to the other races in this Colony to recognise their economic and political aspirations and to facilitate their attainment'. The Europeans

and Indo-Fijian had made their contribution to the Colony 'and they are entitled to be admitted into full membership of the Colonial family'. To those who harped on division and distinctions, the Commissioner said: 'The interests of the three races are not as so many independent threads, but strands which are interwoven into one economic fabric; and each strand is essential to the strength of the whole'.<sup>25</sup> To those who invoked the real and imagined British promises to the Fijian people, he replied:

*The obligation of the Government to the Fijians can be stated comprehensively in a few sentences: we must preserve all that is good of their culture, but not outworn customs and ways of life; we must give them the opportunities and the means to expand that culture; we must protect them from exploitation and disease; and otherwise so govern and lead these people as ultimately to achieve their full integration into the political and economic life of a composite society comprising all the races of the Colony.*

Such overarching, inclusive visions were rare.

In the Colonial Office, opinion was similarly divided. On one side were those who urged caution and sympathy for the Fijian position. JB Sidebotham was adamant that any attempt by Europeans and Indo-Fijians to force the pace of change should be 'firmly resisted', otherwise 'we are not fulfilling our duties as guardians'. Removing the official majority would place Fijians at the mercy of Europeans and Indo-Fijians 'who would undoubtedly use the resulting situation for their own ends'. And any change which disturbed the traditional social structure - elections, for example - would be 'the greatest disservice that we could do the Fijians', because they would become the 'plaything of political parties of other races'.<sup>26</sup> Sir Charles Jefferies disagreed. The status quo could not continue indefinitely; electoral representation had to bear some resemblance to the size of the different communities:

*We cannot hope to hold indefinitely or perhaps for very long, the position that an official autocracy is necessary because the Fijian community is backward. We have to face the fact that the Fijians are only half the population of the Colony. The other half consists mainly of Indians, with a not negligible minority of whites. We, as trustees, have a special obligation to protect the interests of the Fijian race, but it is obvious that the ultimate goal must be a constitution based on a Fijian citizenship which shall include persons of all races who have made their home in the Colony.*<sup>27</sup>

Times and contexts have changed, but the fundamental issues remain: claim of paramountcy by some and parity by others, the preconditions for full Fijian citizenship for different communities, the rights of indigenous versus immigrant communities in the governance of the country, and the role and place of traditional institutions and values in the modern democratic arena.

In the 1950s, official sluggishness began to yield. The main reason was the appointment of Sir Ronald Garvey as governor. Garvey was an independent-minded, self-confident, experienced Pacific hand, having served in the Solomon Islands as Resident Commissioner. Unlike his predecessors, Garvey kept regular contact with the main political actors in the Colony. He was close to Sukuna, the preeminent Fijian leader, as well as to AD Patel and Vishnu Deo, Sukuna's counterparts among Indo-Fijians. The European establishment distrusted him. From his conversations and observations, Garvey was convinced of the need for change: 'slow, but fairly steady, progress is being made [towards common citizenship]. Both colour and social barriers are being broken down and the desirability and, indeed, inevitability of unity is taking shape. It is a policy which I constantly preach myself and it is having its imperceptible effect throughout the whole community.'<sup>28</sup> In 1954, Garvey asked the Council of Chiefs to consider directly electing three of their five representatives to the Legislative Council to give Fijians experience of elections. He told the chiefs that the 'chiefly system on which so much depends should march with the times and should not ignore - for too long - the modern trend of democracy'. To those who invoked the Deed of Cession in support of gradualism and permanent paramountcy of Fijian interests, Garvey responded with characteristic, though unprecedented, bluntness. This is what he said in his Cession Day message in 1957:

*Surely the intention of this Deed, acknowledged and accepted by chiefs who were parties to it, was that Fiji should be developed so as to take a significant place in the affairs of the world but that, in the process, the rights and interests of the Fijian people should be respected. To read into the Deed more than that, to suggest for instance, that the rights and interests of the Fijians should predominate over everything else, does no service either to the Fijian people or to their country. The view, for the Fijians, would mean complete protection and no self-respecting individual race wants that because, ultimately, it means that those subject to it will end up as museum pieces. The Indians are equally eligible to have their interests respected. By their work and enterprise, the Indians in Fiji have made a great contribution to the development and prosperity of their country, and to the welfare of its people. They are an essential part of the community and it is unrealistic to suppose that they are not or to imagine that the position of Fijians in the world today would benefit by their absence.<sup>29</sup>*

After four years of listening and reflection, Garvey approached the Colonial Office in 1956 with fresh proposals.<sup>30</sup> His ultimate goal was a common Fijian citizenship, he said, but he acknowledged that racial parity among the three main communities would have to be retained, along with separate (communal) representation 'for an indefinite period'. He had changed his mind about retaining the official majority in the Legislative Council. The main reason for an official majority was to protect certain important interests, such as the interests of the Fijian community. In practice, though, he had never found it necessary to use the official majority. 'I do not think there is any danger in the Government being defeated if the official majority were removed, always provided the Governor were invested with reserved powers, and I consider that a healthier atmosphere would be created if it went.' Garvey also wanted to abolish nomination. That would be a very popular move. 'Whatever may be said about nominated members they are always regarded as Government yes-men, even though they frequently are among Government's more trenchant critics, and this taint vitiates them in the public eye. The choice of them becomes more and more difficult, and their value just as difficult to assess, and little - if anything - would be lost if the system were discontinued.' He was echoing his predecessor Freestone who had told the Colonial Office in 1949 that he 'attached little value or importance to maintaining the principle of nominated members, and should shed no tears if the nominated seats... were thrown open for election'.<sup>31</sup> Garvey also recommended that the number of elected Europeans and Indo-Fijians be increased from three to five, the former justified by the size of Suva's European population, and the latter because of the large increase in the Indo-Fijian population. As for the Fijians, Garvey wanted the Council of Chiefs' desire to elect all five of its representatives recognised. The Fijians were not yet ready for direct election, but his suggestion was a move in the right direction.

Perhaps his most radical proposal was a 'Multi-Racial Bench' of four members, one each from the three main racial groups and one to represent 'other races' such as the Chinese and other Pacific island groups, all elected from a colony-wide constituency on a common roll 'whose votes will be proportionately weighted to maintain equality of racial influence on the election'. This was the first time that such a proposal had been made by a governor. Garvey was not supported by his closest advisors, who argued that a multiracial bench would be opposed by Europeans and Fijians 'as the thin edge of the wedge driving to a common roll', paving the way for reforms far too radical for the colony to bear. They also argued that candidates not elected by their own racial group would be regarded as puppets of the groups whose votes elected them. Garvey was aware of the dangers but undaunted, saying that 'if we are aiming at a growth of a consciousness of Fijian citizenship over-riding differences of race and religion, I think it has considerable merit'. Maintaining the status quo was no solution.

Garvey's proposal was widely discussed by the old colonial hands - the back room boys, Garvey called them derisively - at the Colonial Office who raised all the tired old arguments about the need for Whitehall to 'keep a firm grip of the initiative', and act 'just in advance of pressure, but only just'.<sup>32</sup> The racial factor had to be taken into account. 'It is true that constitutional advance does not wait upon a country-wide demand, but the circumstances of Fiji are rather special and to go too fast would...play into the hands of the Indians.' 'If there is no pressure for a change, we should be the last to stimulate

it', advised one. Perhaps Garvey was actuated by the desire to end his term of office by 'some significant advance'. The Secretary of State replied on 20 March 1956:

*It seems to us to be very unwise to do anything to encourage it [constitutional reform] to grow more quickly unless we have some fairly clear idea where we are going. In some respects Fiji is a very difficult proposition from the point of view of constitutional advance. We are all, very naturally, inclined to think of such advance in terms of British institutions, leading in the direction of an elected assembly, universal adult suffrage, the party system, the vesting of executive power in unofficial Ministers and so forth. Yet we are learning by experience elsewhere that the traditional British pattern, however suitable for places of ascertain size, is difficult to work out in small territories, even where there is a homogenous and relatively well advanced population; it is still more difficult to apply in such a place as Fiji, where race means more than party, and where a dilemma is created by the numerical preponderance of the Indians on the one hand and our obligation to the Fijians on the other. It may well be that what we ought to aim at in Fiji is some form of constitution which differs considerably from the traditional pattern. In this connection you may like to look at the enclosed document about another of our problem places - Mauritius - not because the ideas which are being tried out there are necessarily all applicable... but as an illustration of the fact that new ways are being sought to establish forms of democracy and of representative institutions in places where the conditions favourable to the 'Westminster model' do not exist.*

Caution and circumspection was the Colonial Office advice. The official majority should remain, not because it was desirable in itself, but to avoid pressure for further changes, 'to retain the initiative and to forestall even less desirable developments', and to dilute the intensity of competition for political power by the different communities. The appointment of a constitutional commissioner, as Garvey suggested, was also declined. Garvey and his advisors were the ones best placed to assess the situation on the ground. In any case, it was 'an illusion to suppose that any Commissioner strange to the country could be expected to produce, out of the blue, a solution for the very peculiar problem of Fiji'. It would be better to encourage the communities to work together in Local Government, before tackling the larger constitutional questions at the central level. That was where any innovation should begin.

Garvey was disappointed but not surprised.<sup>33</sup> The fears of the floodgates were, in truth, groundless, he said. In taking the initiative, he was 'not playing with a scorpion's tail'. His modest proposals would have resulted in 'some quickening of interest in a direction where we are failing to make progress even though we are far better equipped than many who have raced ahead of us'. If Fiji were to wait for integration to take place at the local government level, before proceeding to any constitutional change, 'we shall have to wait too long for progress in that direction'. When recommending the appointment of a commissioner to advise on constitutional matters, Garvey was not thinking of anyone entirely unfamiliar with Fiji. He had in mind Sir Arthur Richards, now Lord Milverton, a widely respected former governor, who had engineered, with Ratu Sukuna's assistance, the creation of the Native Lands Trust Board.

Three years after Garvey's proposal, another debate took place. The motion, for the first time since 1929, was moved by an Indo-Fijian member, James Madhavan, calling again for reduction of the official majority and the end of nomination.<sup>34</sup> The European and Indo-Fijian members made their predictable responses, but more interesting was the contribution of the Fijian members. They belonged to a new generation, well educated and articulate, unlike their predecessors whose contributions in debate were hampered by poor English and unfamiliarity with western ways and western systems of government. Among them was Semesa Sikivou, an independent-minded commoner and a highly effective debater. He made it clear that he was speaking on his own behalf and not as a representative of his people. He was not opposed to all change. Fijian people would not like to be 'entirely separated' from the United Kingdom, but time was coming when people would have to learn to accept more responsibility for managing their own affairs. If they refused to do so, they could hardly turn around and criticise the colonial Government for being dictatorial. He would be more forthright in demanding

more change, not less, were it not for the fact that one of the 'chief reasons for many people's opposition to this motion is the fear of domination'. He meant Indo-Fijian domination. Still, he favoured an unofficial majority and direct election of the Fijian members. He also supported the enfranchisement of women. Sikivou's colleague, Ravuama Vunivalu, perhaps the ablest Fijian of his generation, explained that though he would oppose the motion, he was not against extending the franchise to the Fijian people. The Fijian was 'more than ready to exercise his vote', but instead of electing all the five Fijian seats directly, he would like three of them to be elected and two nominated. Like many other Fijians and Europeans, he feared that Madhavan's motion represented a 'thin end of the wedge', a step that would lead 'probably before we are prepared for it, to the common electoral roll or proportional representation'. Vunivalu liked the idea of an unofficial majority, but thought it premature because the Fijian people were not prepared for it.

The three chiefs in the Council were cautious. Ratu Penaia Ganilau agreed that some constitutional reform was desirable, but he would rather let the colonial government take the lead. He would favour giving the Fijians the vote if some practical difficulties could be overcome, such as allowing Fijian civil servants to stand for elections without resigning from the service as there were few Fijians outside the civil service who had the experience and the education to represent their people. Ratu George Cakobau, Vunivalu of Bau, traditionally and symbolically the most important Fijian leader, could see no reason for change. Not surprisingly, he invoked the Deed of Cession. Constitutional change along the lines suggested 'would mean that the Fijian race would be completely divorced from the clauses of the Deed of Cession and would be placed on the same footing as other alien races in this Colony'. Nor did he 'favour any mention of African policy [of gradual experiment in reform] being brought into Fiji'.

Ratu Mara opposed the motion because, for him, it presaged the common roll, a form of election for which Fiji was simply not ready:

*The races in this Colony are different; religions in this Colony are different; the economy of the different races in this colony are different; the social behaviour of various races in the Colony are different; their views on the position of women in public are different, and because of their differing economic standards they have different social standards and because they have different social standards their social thoughts are different.*

The precondition for constitutional reform, for Mara, was a common platform, a common standard. By that logic, any constitutional reform was virtually impossible. Having an unofficial majority would not 'put more money into the hands of the Fijian', nor would it provide better protection of fundamental Fijian interests. But one aspect of the motion that he did agree with was that all unofficial members of the Council, including Fijians, should be elected. On the question of an unofficial majority, Mara thought the time was not right. He had a point: 'What would happen if the financial policy of the unofficial party falls down? Must we then resign, go to the country and ask the present official party to carry on? It is confusing. We have no party politics and until we have party politics, we cannot presume to carry the burden of financial and political power all in one hand and for that reason I do not think we are ready to take this advance and have Unofficial Majority.'

The motion was lost on voice vote, but it had become clear that the door on reform had not been shut permanently. There were vocal expressions of dissent, but also a willingness to entertain the prospect of selective change. Fiji of the late 1950s was a very different place than it had been at the beginning of the decade. It had witnessed a series of lightning strikes in the mid-1950s, culminating in the December 1959 riots in the streets of Suva which left the colonial establishment and European business houses in Suva deeply shaken. A strike in the sugar industry was in prospect, after a peaceful interlude of nearly two decades. The population was increasing and becoming better informed about events in Fiji and abroad, thanks to the thriving newspaper industry and the advent of radio. Fijian soldiers were returning after four years of service in the Malayan jungles. Two major enquiries or rather commissions of enquiry were underway, one by OIK Spate into the economic problems of the Fijian people and the other into the natural resources and population trends in the colony.<sup>35</sup> In view of these changes, and

decolonisation elsewhere in the Empire, constitutional questions could no longer be postponed.

In his address to the Budget session in November 1960, the new Governor, Sir Kenneth Maddocks, tested the waters by suggesting in general terms the need for reform, hoping that the next election (in 1963) might take place under new Letters Patent. The aim was to give more responsibility to unofficial members 'without making any radical alteration in the composition of the Legislative Council', but moving towards the ministerial system of government.

Constitutional reform was to proceed in two stages. The first would involve the introduction of the Member System.<sup>36</sup> Under this system, unofficial members of the Executive Council would be invited to undertake supervisory function over a number of departments, contribute to policy formulation and execution, and observe the principle of collective, cabinet-type responsibility. They would introduce Bills emanating from their departments in the Legislative Council and oversee their passage through it. They would act like ministers, but without executive power. If they could not support a decision on major policy matters, they would have to resign. The new Legislative Council would consist of 23 members, 11 unofficial, 8 official and 4 unofficial Government members, but the official members would not, as previously, be required to take their seat in the Council. The Member system, the government hoped, would provide the necessary 'training in responsibility which is essential to a full ministerial system'. It would also enable the civil service to gain experience in the new system. The second stage would be the introduction of the ministerial system with full executive responsibility. The members of the Executive Council would be chosen by the governor from the elected members of the Legislative Council.

The government's proposals were debated in the April 1961 sitting,<sup>37</sup> the motion introduced by the Acting Colonial Secretary. His tone is almost pleading, begging European and Fijian members to have an open mind on reform. For the first time, the government was taking the lead, somewhat along the lines Garvey had envisaged in the mid-1950s. The government pleaded with the unofficial members of the Legislative Council to look towards the future, 'to try and establish for ourselves a long term objective'. The winds of decolonisation were moving closer to the Pacific. Samoa was on the verge of independence and Fiji could ill afford to be indifferent. 'I know it would be nice to consider Fiji in a vacuum and isolated and do as we wish, but unfortunately we cannot', the Acting Colonial Secretary told the Legislative Council.

*We are part of the world and there are forces moving which, whether we like it or not - and I know many of us do not like it - are going to have a profound influence on us and on our future. We need to consider these forces; what they are and what steps are necessary to meet and mould them to our ends. We want to do it in our own unhurried time. We do not want to wait till the forces are built up against us and we have to do things as a matter of urgency. Let us think ahead, see what is coming, be ready for it and do all that we have to do in our own time, and by own choosing... Do not let us forget the forces outside. It is no good forgetting them; they are there and they are real.*

There is little doubt that the government had in mind the pressure from the United Nations, particularly its Committee on Decolonisation, a pressure that would mount throughout the 1960s.

Then the Colonial Secretary turned to those who always tried to clinch the no-change argument by saying that the advocates of change were a minority, and that the majority of the people were satisfied with the status quo. This is what the Burns Commission itself had said, but the government thought otherwise. Again, the Colonial Secretary is worth quoting.

*...almost everything starts with a minority. Minorities have a way of growing, and when minorities have a popular idea any Government which ignores such a minority does so at its peril. A minority can be likened to a small stream. It is there, something quite small and water is soft. It can be used for many purposes. If you dam the stream the waters build up behind the dam so you build a bigger dam, but one day you cannot go on and the burst comes. We do not*

*want a burst here. What we want is to look together into the future and be sure that this stream of ideas, this minority perhaps, this thing called democracy is not dammed up or held back, but is guided to our purpose. We want no burst dam.*

He adduced the usual arguments for change: the devolution of responsibility to the colonies was official British policy. It was a powerful performance.

As was to be expected, the Indo-Fijian members supported the motion while Europeans opposed it. What mattered more now than ever before was what Fijians thought. Fijian opinion was not as solidly against change as in the past, nor was it unanimous. Although the majority opposed the motion, they did so for quite different reasons. Among those who remained unconvinced of the government's policy was Ratu Mara, the ascendant Fijian political leader and successor to Ratu Sukuna. The government's motion was ill-conceived and ill-timed, he said, because it ignored the spirit and implications of the Deed of Cession and the special place of the Fijian people in their own country. The chiefs had ceded Fiji 'to be part and parcel of the United Kingdom', in the way that the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man were integral parts of the UK. That special relationship was recognised in the fact that the Queen was always referred to as *Radi ni Viti kei Peretania*, the Queen of Fiji and of Great Britain. This innovative and expedient - and ultimately unsustainable - point would be raised again and again as the momentum towards self government increased.

Mara urged caution and gradualism. The Fijian people had just accepted that three of their five representatives in the Legislative Council should be elected through secret ballot. Would it not be better for the government to see how these changes worked before embarking on more reform. Constitutional development should follow, not precede, social and economic integration. Ratu Penaia Ganilau agreed: no constitution would work unless 'we have a common background of accepted principles'. And he castigated the government for taking the lead on the question without consulting the people. Ratu Edward Cakobau concurred that the usage and ownership of native land should be safeguarded before the Fijian people would consider constitutional reform. Ravuama Vunivalu spoke for all Fijians when he said that the Fijian people would accept constitutional change if, but only if, Whitehall would give them unequivocal assurance that their interests would always remain paramount and that as the indigenous people, they would have majority representation in both the Executive and the Legislative Councils. The Fijian people needed a practical demonstration of the principle that Fijian interests should be paramount.

Semesa Sikivou supported the motion although he, too, broadly shared the anxieties of his fellow Fijian members. Fijians were opposed to constitutional change because they distrusted the Indo-Fijian community, that is the fear of Indo-Fijian dominance. But that was not sufficient reason to fear change. Change was inevitable, and it was no use postponing changes for another day. Sikivou suggested a constitutional convention, which would include leaders not presently in the Legislative Council, 'to discuss the proposed changes on the grounds of common interest, common belief, common aim and to see if we can get some unanimity over some fundamental questions'. That way, the peoples' views would be properly represented. To Sikivou, it was clear that 'we cannot go on as we are if we are going to have a Fiji with a bright future'.

The government listened politely, knowing that it had no alternative but to take the lead, though without embarrassing the Fijian members who opposed the motion. Instead of calling for a division, it withdrew the motion, with the concurrence of the leaders of all three main ethnic groups. It attempted to allay the fears of Fijian leaders, without compromising the principles of constitutional reform. Ratu Mara's point about comparability with the Isle of Man was rejected. The two island groups had completely different histories and unique relationships with the imperial power. The government denied that its proposals detracted from the promises of the Deed of Cession, and assured the Fijian leaders that it would entrench provisions regarding the native ownership of land as well as others that touched on customary matters. To the argument that social and economic integration should precede political reform, the government argued that 'Unity does not have to grow from the bottom. In fact, when there are present

communities speaking different languages, having different religions, living mostly in a different economy and having different customs', unity 'can spread downwards'. The government was not doing anything that the British Government itself had not adopted as official policy. The Colonial Secretary reminded the Legislative Council that as early as 1943, the United Kingdom had pledged itself 'to guide Colonial people along the road to self-government within the British Empire', adding that 'It is no part of our policy to confer political advances which are unjustified by circumstances or to grant self-government to those who are not yet trained in its use'. For the Colonial Office, the latter qualification had reached the end of its life.

In any case, Maddocks advised the Colonial Office in October 1961 to accept his recommendations for changes along the lines indicated in the memorandum to the Legislative Council earlier in the year.<sup>38</sup> Fiji should proceed to the Membership system notwithstanding the nearly unanimous Fijian and European opposition. That opposition, the governor told London, was caused partly by the events of 1960 which had seen a devastating strike in the sugar industry and riots in the streets of Suva, an attitude which he predicted would pass with time, especially 'when it is more generally understood that the Governor with his reserve powers can protect legitimate Fijian interests'. Members would continue to be elected from communal rolls, the idea of even limited introduction of common roll suggested by some of the Indo-Fijian members (and by Garvey in the mid-1950s) being rejected out of hand. The principle of parity would be maintained.

In 1963, Fiji got new Letters Patent which provided a bigger Legislative Council, consisting of 19 official and 18 unofficial members. Each of the three main communities had six members, four elected from communal rolls and two nominated by the governor. Universal adult franchise was introduced. Property qualifications for voters and candidates were abolished, and for the first time the ballot box reached the Fijian people. And not least, for the first time incipient political parties and ad hoc groups emerged to contest the election. These changes might appear small, but they were significant. Fiji was on its way to more internal self government, with the Membership System introduced early in 1964, and the ministerial system in 1966. The issue after 1963 was not if self-government and independence would come, but the terms and conditions upon which they would be acceptable to its various ethnic communities.

There would be posturing and asserting entrenched positions, accusations of betrayal of solemn promises, predictions of dire consequences and blood baths, but the big picture was clear: the status quo would have to go. The Fijian position was defined in the now famous Wakaya Letter of 17 January, 1963,<sup>39</sup> encapsulating the views expressed in earlier years: acknowledgement of the letter and spirit of the Deed of Cession - the paramountcy of Fijian interests - including the entrenchment of Fijian rights and interests in the ownership and leasing of land, the declaration of Fiji as a Christian state and the pre-eminent role of the Fijian Affairs Board and the Great Council of Chiefs in Fijian affairs. The Indo-Fijian community would remind the government of the promises of equal rights it and the Imperial government had made (for example in Salisbury's Despatch promising equal rights of Indian settlers), and would seek political change on the basis of parity and common roll. And the Europeans would make their case for their special privileged place in the Fijian sun on account of their vast contribution to the development of Fiji. The main task for Fiji's political leaders, the colonial government and the Colonial Office after 1963 would be to negotiate a constitutional reconciliation of the competing claims of paramountcy, parity and privilege within the framework of a democratic polity. But that is another story.



1. I am grateful to Donald Denoon for asking me to write this paper and for correcting an earlier draft. I also thank Peter Rule for his research assistance and Tomasi Vakatora for many conversations about Fiji politics.
2. For developments to 1937, see Ahmed Ali, *FBI and the Franchise, 1900-1937*, PhD thesis, ANU, 1973.
3. K.L. Gillion, *Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920-1946*, Canberra, 1977.
4. Legislative Council Debate, August 1943.
5. *Ibid.*, 21 December 1945.
6. *Ibid.*, September 1948.
7. Ratu Sukuna, *Fiji: The Three-Legged Stool*, London, 1984, ed. Deryck Scarr.
8. Words from his contribution to the July 1946 'Deed of Cession' Legislative Council debate.
9. In Colonial Office series 83/253/2.
10. Legislative Council Paper 15 of 1949. The other members were H.M. Scott, Ratu ET Cakobau, Joeli K. Ravai, Vishnu Deo and M.S. Buksh.
11. In Colonial Office series CO 83/245/7.
12. Colonial Office minute 18 Sept. 1947.
13. Scott to Boyd, 11 August 1955.
14. See, e.g., Vishnu Deo's contribution to the Legislative Council Debate, December 1946.
15. Legislative Council Debate, 1948.
16. A private note by Sukuna, written in 1947 in CO 83/245/4.
17. Resolution passed on 19 July 1946, following a debate on Amie Ragg's motion to reaffirm the terms of the Deed of Cession.
18. The Indo-Fijian reaction is developed in my *A Vision for Change: AD Patel and the Politics of Fiji*, Canberra, 1997. See also my *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century*, Honolulu, 1992.
19. See my *Girmitiyas: the Origins of the Fiji Indians*, Canberra, 1983.
20. See my *Vision for Change*, Chapter 4, and *Broken Waves*, 86ff.
21. Meeting between Dugdale and Vishnu Deo and other Indo-Fijian representatives in Suva on 2 August 1951. I have a fairly full set of Muslim petitions in this period in my possession.
22. Garvey to Colonial Office, 16 Aug. 1954, Fiji Despatch 362. Acting Governor AR Stoddart in a note to the Colonial Office 7 July 1955 expressed a similar view. Whatever might be the situation in India, he said, 'experience in Fiji has shown that, except on religious grounds, the Muslims and Hindus have much in common and have for decades lived amicably together'.
23. Freestone to Colonial Office 15 Sept. 1949, Despatch 100.
24. Grantham to Colonial Office, 28 Aug. 1946, Despatch 104.
25. Legislative Council Debate, July 1946.
26. Colonial Office minute 9 September 1947.
27. Colonial Office minute 18 September 1947.
28. Colonial Office series CO 1036/9

29. *Fiji Times*, 15 October 1957.
30. Garvey to Sir Thomas Lloyd, Personal and confidential, 11 February 1956.
31. Freestone to Sidebotham, 12 February 1950.
32. See Sir Charles Jefferies' minutes in CO 1036/10.
33. Garvey to McPherson (Colonial Office), 4 October 1956.
34. Legislative Council Debate, April 1959.
35. OHK Spate, *The Fijian People: Economic Problems and Prospects*, Legislative Council Paper 13, Government of Fiji, and Sir Alan Burns, et.al *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Natural Resources and Population Trends of the Colony of Fiji 1959*, Legislative Council Paper 1 of 1960, Government of Fiji.
36. Legislative Council Paper 8 of 1961.
37. Legislative Council Debate, 21 April 1961.
38. Legislative Council Paper 40 of 1961.
39. A copy is in my *Broken Waves*, 189.

## Who Made Western Samoa Independent?

Ben Featuna'i Liua'ana (ANU)

Western Samoa became an independent nation in 1962. And every year since then, Samoans remember with pride their independence, hoisting their national flag, singing their unique national anthem, and zealously attending commemorative church services. In fact, Samoans would agree that God alone should be glorified for giving Western Samoa independence, and the national motto, *Fa'avae I le Atua Samoa* (Samoa founded on God), bear witness to this conviction. Unfortunately, religious convictions sometimes disguise people's true feelings and opinions when the question of 'Who made Samoa Independent?' is raised outside a religious environment. When this happens, God takes a back seat: personal arrogance and family self-esteem surface to claim the honour.

When missionary enterprises opened up Samoa to religious instruction,<sup>1</sup> traders, merchants, plantations owners, thrill seekers and prospectors followed closely in their wake. Europeans had no cause to disrupt the unorthodox politics of the Samoan people as they were left alone to pursue their dreams. The missions had no quarrel with Samoan politics either, as long as missionary works were promoted and the missions were free from political disruptions. But European manipulation and Samoan enthusiasm and aspirations, fuelled by European greed, soon destroyed any kind of political harmony the Samoans may have tried to achieve through their political system. By the mid 1860s, Samoan differences over *matai* titles, and stubborn attitudes towards monarchical government, led to conflict and hostility. Europeans retaliated with threats of warships and long periods of exile for defiant Samoan *matai*, if Samoans failed to compromise on the formation of a workable central government.

In the 1870s, Steinberger set up a central government that was agreeable to all Samoan factions, as well as satisfying European demands. However, Steinberger's personal ambitions and aspirations, together with jealousy and non-supportive attitudes of consuls and missions, soon destroyed any hope of a peaceful and workable central government.<sup>2</sup> With Steinberger's failure, the Samoan leaders, Malietoa Laupepa, Tamasese Titimaea, and Mata'afa Iosefo, exploited their various friendships with Germany, Britain, and America, in order to gain Samoan leadership for any government the Europeans saw fit to implement. Many attempts to implement a central government failed due to a constant fallout between Samoan leaders and their European allies. Whenever a new government came into being, Samoans would take up the challenge energetically to enhance their own status and authority, to the irritation of the Europeans. The repercussions were usually fatal for the Samoans, with Europeans seizing the opportunity to condemn Samoans for their lack of discipline and incompetence, and finding the perfect excuse to interfere in Samoan affairs.<sup>3</sup>

In 1899 Germany, Britain and America, without consulting the Samoan people, decided the future of Samoa. Everyone wanted Samoa for either political or economic reasons, but no one wanted Samoa as a keepsake. America only wanted a small piece for a harbour and reluctantly took over the protection of the Samoa islands to the east. Britain, whom the Samoans had always respected and shown great loyalty to, effortlessly handed over Western Samoa to the Germans in return for several Melanesian islands. Samoans were shocked, and felt betrayed by this careless disregard.<sup>4</sup> The German Administration, under Wilhelm Solf, quickly implemented policies which promoted German society and culture, including the compulsory use of the German language and singing the German anthem in schools. Solf also honoured Mata'afa Iosefo with the title *Alii Sili* (Highest or Greater *Matai*), which gave Mata'afa a status and influence among his peers, but made him very much a puppet for Solf.<sup>5</sup>

Under Germany, there were many dissatisfied *matai*, especially the influential *Tumua ma Pule* faction, who continued to rebel against German rule in an effort to regain their traditional authority

and status. For instance, Namulau'ulu Lauaki influenced and promoted the *Mau a Pule* in 1909 which led to many *matai* being exiled to the Mariana Islands.<sup>6</sup> Namulau'ulu's efforts failed because Solf had offered plenty of incentives to Mata'afa Iosefo and other *matai* to ensure that every law and ordinance was carried out with great efficiency and loyalty. Mata'afa himself declared that *Tumua ma Pule* was a thing of the past and personally acknowledged Germany's sovereign authority over Western Samoa.<sup>7</sup> Solf also ensured that those loyal to the Administration were publicly rewarded, not only in monetary terms but with favours and gifts in the name of the Kaiser. Such astute actions stirred Samoan loyalty more deeply.

The abolition of the *Alii Sili* title after the death of Mata'afa Iosefo in 1912, not only lessened the authority and status of the *matai* but also reaffirmed Germany's claim as sole ruler and power in Western Samoa, which 'shall be a government into eternity.' The German Administration, in order to keep influential *matai* loyal, created and bestowed upon Malietoa Tanumafili I and Tupua Tamasese Meaole I the position of *Fautua* (Advisers), which according to Malama Meleisea 'was the beginning of the formal recognition of the *tama a 'aiga'* (sons of the families).<sup>8</sup> But these positions carried limited prestige and little authority. Many *matai* became disheartened as they began to realise that Western Samoa would never re-establish a traditional government, nor achieve self-government, under Germany.

The London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), trusted advisers and promoters of Samoan affairs, decreased in influence as fewer missionaries arrived from Britain and Australia. The Samoan pastors, especially those of the LMS, became more involved in the administration of their own church. They savoured the prestige, authority and power that came with increased responsibility. It was about this time that the Samoan (LMS) Church toyed with the idea of self-government. But after been given the opportunity to fulfil their wish the Church leaders opted to conserve the *status quo*, because they were not prepared for the task. What the church had wanted was full administration of church affairs, with the LMS taking a passive supervisory role - an escape hatch in case things went wrong.<sup>9</sup>

With the advent of World War One, Samoans welcomed the opportunity to contemplate their future. The departure of the German Administration gave the *matai*, especially the *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule*, the chance to revive their customs and traditions, including the strengthening of their *matai* authority and power. The war ended in 1918, and the United Nations entrusted New Zealand with the administration of Western Samoa. Samoans felt strongly against the proposal and asked that Western Samoa be administered by Britain instead. As Samoan opinions mattered very little, New Zealand took the opportunity to increase its status among the nations of the world.

New Zealand's inexperience as a colonial administrator rekindled and excited Samoan political ambitions, which had been dormant and threatening to lapse into obscurity. The influenza epidemic in 1918, and some very insensitive public relation efforts, together with a selfish and superior attitude among officials, contributed immensely to the rejection of New Zealand, and to growing Samoan opinions that New Zealand was weak, and did not possess the same authority as the German Administration.<sup>10</sup> Samoans opposed many laws and ordinances, and New Zealand turned to banishments and removal of titles, just as the Germans had done, to alleviate these problems. Samoans reacted differently and more strongly against New Zealand. The implementation of taxes and the take over of many business enterprises once in the hands of local merchants, traders, and planters, not only further alienated New Zealand from the Samoans, but also from their European and half caste supporters.<sup>11</sup>

Samoan pressure and New Zealand mismanagement eventually led to the *Mau* movement in 1926. The movement at first was confined to a few dejected half castes and Europeans seeking economic independence and control, and a few *matai* seeking political recognition and status. But the movement quickly grew as many Samoans joined, whether or not they understood the aims of the *Mau*, as New Zealand's incompetence (at times exaggerated by dissatisfied Europeans and half

castes), became deeply implanted in the emotionally charged and impressionable minds of the Samoans. The movement exploded into a large scale political rebellion and, more important, triggered nationalistic sentiments (to the point of dying for one's *matai*), which had not surfaced since the late nineteenth century. The movement was taken to dangerous new heights with the killing of several Samoans, including Tamasese Lealofi I, during a peaceful, but politically charged gathering in Apia, on 28 December, 1929.<sup>12</sup>

The *Mau* gained strength as Samoans, half castes, Europeans, and even Chinese,<sup>13</sup> supported Samoan appeals to end New Zealand rule, and to grant self-government. Western Samoa's political problems gained sympathetic responses from people in Australia, Britain, America, and New Zealand. The *Mau* also challenged New Zealand's rule by setting up a rival government, with many supporters willing to go to prison in defiance of New Zealand policies. World War Two diffused the possibility of a physical confrontation. After the war, in 1945, New Zealand was more receptive to Western Samoa's wish for self-government, due to a new mandate proposed by the United Nations. The mandate gave New Zealand the opportunity to restore some prestige. More important, the mandate provided New Zealand with the best solution on how to relinquish Western Samoa, and free New Zealand of an unwanted burden and political embarrassment, without being seen to be forced out by Samoan resistance.

In May 1961, a plebiscite under universal suffrage was held to canvass opinion on a newly drafted constitution, and whether to concede to Western Samoa becoming an independent nation. At first, the Samoan political leaders strongly rejected the idea of universal suffrage in favour of *matai* voters only. Two reasons may be put forth for the rejection. First, the Samoan leaders felt that apart from the *matai*, Samoans did not fully grasp the essence of the constitution and the importance of independence. Second, and most important, the Samoan political leaders, and *matai*, may have felt that a plebiscite under universal suffrage undermined the *matais'* status and role as sole representative and speakers for their families. The plebiscite was a sign of disrespect and a challenge to the *matais'* honour. But the leaders reluctantly accepted the proposal when the issue threatened to block independence negotiations. Samoans voted in favour after some persuasive campaigning by the Samoan leaders. J.W. Davidson recorded that:

*Tupua Tamasese and Fiamé and other leaders delivered broadcast addresses, in which they not only stated the case for the constitution and for the independence but also suggested that casting a negative vote would be an act of treachery.*<sup>14</sup>

The positive result gave many Samoans the impression that there was overwhelming support for independence and for the constitution. But with 20% voting against the constitution, and 30% voting against independence, and taking into consideration Davidson's comment that voters were coerced by the political leaders and *matai*, doubt arises as to whether the majority of Samoans truly wanted independence in the form in which they received it. Questions also arise as to whether genuine opinions were suppressed due to intimidation, and the manipulative influence of the *matai* on their 'aiga (families).

In the mid-1850s, Samoans wanted to manage their own affairs, but with a strong desire for Britain to act as protector, adviser, financier, and generally a 'father' to the people. This desire never changed under German and New Zealand Administrations. When preparations were made to carry out the terms of the United Nations mandate, Davidson pointed out that the Samoans worked hard for self-government. Not until the question of what kind of relationship New Zealand and Samoa should advocate after Samoa became self-governing, according to Davidson, was the word independence mentioned for the first time in place of 'self government'. Davidson saw this change of terminology as 'more accurately descriptive of the intentions of the Samoan and New Zealand governments', and he was correct.<sup>15</sup> New Zealand, the United Nations, and even Davidson, did not distinguish between self-government and independence, because either the former is synonymous with the latter, or the former usually culminates in the latter. But Samoans had a very different

understanding of the terms. The fact that Davidson mentioned a positive reaction to the change of terminology by the Samoan leaders suggests that the Samoans had a very different agenda regarding their future. Furthermore, the manipulative circumstances of the plebiscite suggest that many Samoans silently wanted something other than a fully independent state. Nevertheless, the aspirations of both countries were realised with much emotion and forgiveness, and, for many Samoans, with relief.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion:

Today, the debate continues on whether Western Samoa should, or should not, have become independent. Even more contentious is the question of 'Who Made Samoa Independent?' - a question which has recently triggered passion among supporters of traditional Samoan politics. In a speech to the Samoan government on behalf of protesters over the Value Added Goods and Service Tax, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi highlighted this passion when he referred to the sacrifice of *Tumua ma Pule*, and to the spilt blood of Samoan leaders, as the forces behind Samoa's freedom.<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising that T.T.T. Efi speaks of the *Mau* passionately. More than any other person, he should be allowed to be boastful, and should be forgiven if he lays claim to the honour of being a descendant of those whom he, and others, consider to be the principal actors in Western Samoa's independence. His forefathers, the likes of Taisi O.F. Nelson, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi I, and Tupua Tamasese Lealofi II, were not only advisers, leaders, and financial backers of the *Mau*, but were also involved in the negotiations for Western Samoa's independence.

Recently, *Tumua ma Pule* have called for Western Samoa to return to traditional politics and customs, adding fuel to the debate. But the attempt to revive old Samoan political ideologies, which had been dominant during the height of the *Mau* movement, and personified by *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule* themselves, has not received the total support of *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule* members.<sup>18</sup> The prospect of a neo-*Mau* movement coming into immediate prominence is, for the meantime, postponed. However, the majority of Samoans are content, at least for the moment, to recognised the *Mau* as being responsible for Western Samoa's independence; a belief that has further inflated the ego of many individuals and their families, to the resentment of others.

Was the *Mau* really responsible for Western Samoa's independence? The *Mau* did give Samoans something, but not independence. The Second World War suspended political ambitions as Samoans, under American military rule, focused all their energy on war preparations. After the war, *Mau* adherents had already returned to their villages, and with the United Nations issuing a mandate to prepare Samoa for self-government, the political leadership was entrusted to a few political leaders. The *Mau* movement was no longer a physical threat, and power and authority were no longer in the hands of the *Mau*, who had earlier sought self government and British protection. The *Mau* had aroused nationalist sentiments among Samoans to support a call for self-government, but after 1945 the *Mau* had lost its vigour and only provided a springboard for the more ambitious leaders to fulfil independence.<sup>19</sup>

The question which needs to be asked is: 'If the *Mau* was not responsible for making Samoa independent, then who was?' To begin with, there is a need to detach ourselves from the narrow interpretations which promoted and gave the honour to individuals, family groups, or a particular organisation. For Western Samoa, no matter how bad its relationships with its colonial masters, especially with New Zealand, independence could not have been achieved without the influence and cooperation of internal and external forces. One of two important external factors was the United Nations who gave the mandate to New Zealand to prepare Samoa for self-government and independence, and provided a committee with experienced in independence negotiations to work closely with the Samoans. Second, the role of New Zealand was crucial, especially the contribution of a sympathetic Labour government, and the overwhelming support of the New Zealand people who rallied and pushed for Western Samoa's independence in order to make up for New Zealand's past deficiencies.<sup>20</sup> Many have advanced the notion that the swiftness of Western Samoa's

independence was due mainly to United Nations efforts, while others have cited New Zealand's prompt desire to get rid of Western Samoa, and Samoans' own thirst for independence. This debate will continue for a long time, but the fact remains that without the full cooperation of these external pressures with Samoan ideologies, historians would be telling a very different story.

There are many internal factors. Two in particular stand out as key factors. First, the influence of the Samoan (LMS) Church, which was also seeking independence from the LMS, and second, *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule* succeeded in suppressing their selfish traditional political rivalry in favour of a trouble-free path to independence.

The Samoan (LMS) Church leaders had earlier turned down the chance to administer their own church affairs, due to inexperience. However, after the 1918 influenza epidemic, which killed many of the older and experienced church leaders, the young inexperienced Samoans who took over the leadership, called for an independent church. By 1926, at the height of the *Mau* movement, ill-feeling between Samoan church leaders and LMS missionaries ripened, forcing the Samoan (LMS) Church to renew its call for self-government. During this time, pastors and church members became deeply involved in the *Mau*, helping to promote Samoan nationalism and self-government. The Samoan (LMS) Church promoted *Mau* proclamations within church meetings and gatherings, changing the image of the church from a Samoan (LMS) Church into a Samoan *Mau* church.<sup>21</sup>

After 1945, *Mau* activities decreased while the Samoan Church continued to keep in touch with independence negotiations through many church members in government. These included deacons, lay preachers, and stewards of the church, who held important positions in government; one of whom was Mata'afa Faumuina Fiamé Mulinuu II, who became the first Prime Minister of the independence state in 1962. The Samoan (LMS) Church became independent in the same year, and with changes in the constitution, it changed its name to Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano I Samoa (Congregational Christian Church in Samoa). Mata'afa, in later years, also held the post of *Ta'ita'ifono* (Chairmanship) of the *Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa*.<sup>22</sup>

The second important internal factor, which also involved Mata'afa Faumuina Fiamé Mulinuu II, was over the procedures regarding the selection of the first Head of State. Four *Tama'aiga*, Malietoa Tanumafili II, Tupua Tamasese Meaole, Tuimaleali'ifano Si'u, and Mata'afa Faumuina Fiamé Mulinuu II, had the credentials for the post. The independence Working Committee, after much division among its members, proposed that the first Head of State be selected from the holders of the Malietoa and Tupua Tamasese titles. Tuimaleali'ifano and Mata'afa supporters in the Working Committee expressed some reservations over the proposal as they

*spoke movingly and courageously, avowing the love of each family for its Tama'aiga but accepting a higher duty to peace and to the nation, and leaving it to the people to find an appropriate place for [Mata'afa and Tuimaleali'ifano] when self-government had been attained.*<sup>23</sup>

The Working Committee voted on the proposal and while it was carried, eight members who supported Mata'afa abstained. When the *Tama'aiga* were informed of the Working Committee's decision, Mata'afa spoke out strongly, dissatisfied at the failure of the Working Committee to find places for himself and Tuimaleali'ifano in the Head of State proposal. Mata'afa pointed out that he and his family would refrain from taking part in the future affairs of the State.<sup>24</sup> This statement was a declaration of war on the other *Tama'aiga*, and the Samoans on the Working Committee, who should have taken a hint from the earlier comments of Tuimaleali'ifano and Mata'afa supporters. Through Samoan customs and diplomacy, the Working Committee begged Mata'afa not to destroy the hope of the people. The *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule* factions also pleaded with Mata'afa to accept graciously. Mata'afa reluctantly withdrew his claim, on condition that his family be considered in future negotiations.<sup>25</sup>

Mata'afa's decision was interpreted by many as a sign of weakness, and an indication that Mata'afa

himself, and the title Mata'afa, were no longer influential. However, Mata'afa may have been pressured by his family into taking a passive stance as the atmosphere was geared towards independence. Mata'afa did not want to be labelled a traitor, and certainly not to be blamed for holding up, or even destroying Samoans' hope for an independent state. Mata'afa's attitude gained him much respect among the *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule*. This respect was highlighted in the confidence placed upon Mata'afa later when he was elected Prime Minister, at the very young age of 38. Perhaps, in being chosen, Mata'afa received the overdue apology he deserved for being left out of the Head of State calculations, and being finally acknowledge as a great leader by his peers, and a reward for humility, and allowing Samoan's the joy of celebrating independence free from traditional political conflicts.

In summary, Western Samoa's independence was made possible through many external and internal factors. The Samoan (LMS) Church and the *Mau* played major roles, providing avenues for nationalist expressions, and providing the only available support, at a time when *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule* needed it. The mandate after the second world war lessened the effect of the *Mau* movement, as an influential group of political leaders took over the struggle. The *Mau* was no longer important because the United Nations and New Zealand provided an avenue for self-government under a new mandate. The plebiscite under universal suffrage almost destroyed independence negotiations but the influence of *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule* averted negative consequences. Finally, the swift settlement regarding the *Tama'aiga* conflict over the Head of State nominations not only prevented a return to traditional rivalries, but indirectly initiated a process towards further diminishing *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule* influence. The increasing debate over 'Who Made Samoa Independent' in recent years provides a clear indication of this point. The election of parliamentary members under universal suffrage in 1995 further reduced the influence of the *matais* in politics. So, 'Who Made Samoa Independent?' I simply say: *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule*, are high on the list. But, over the years, *Tama'aiga* and *Tumua ma Pule* have lost much of their power and authority as Samoans, not the *matais*, take control of Western Samoa's political future. Western Samoan politics, a mixture of traditions and western ideologies, has lost its uniqueness as political power shifts from *Tama'aiga*, *Tumua ma Pule*, and *matai* dominance, to the people themselves through the influence of Western political ideologies; universal suffrage being the latest factor. If this trend continues to eliminate prejudice, then the question of 'Who Made Samoa Independence?' would no longer matter because Samoans would have truly reached full independence - power to the people.

1. The London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived in 1830, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society (WMMS) in 1836, and the Roman Catholics (RC) in 1845.
2. Steinberger Correspondence, Campbell to Samuel Foster, 12 Jan, 1876. (Marist Archives of Samoa and Tokelau); Elloy to Steinberger, 2, 15 Oct, & 12 Dec, 1875, Elloy Letters, 1875-1876. (Marist Archives of Samoa and Tokelau); Taimua to Tipasa, 9 Dec, 1876, Elloy Letters, 1875-1876. (Marist Archives of Samoa and Tokelau); Sylvia Masterman, *Origins of International Rivalry in Samoa, 1845-1884*, London, 1934, 50-130; Joseph Ellison, *Opening and Penetration of Foreign Influence in Samoa to 1880*, Oregon State College, 1938, 75.
3. Joseph Ellison, "The Partition of Samoa: A Study in Imperialism and Diplomacy," in *The Pacific Historical Review*, 8, no. 3, (Sept. 1939): 283-288; *Samoa Times*, "The Samoa Civil Wars of 1893," reprint, n.d.



4. LMS South Seas Letters, Hackett to Thompson, 15 Jun, 1899; Hackett to Thompson, 23 Nov, 1899; Ellison, "The Partition of Samoa..", R.P. Gilson, *Samoa 1830-1900: The Politics of a Multi-Cultural Community*, Melbourne, 1970, 431-433; *Cyclopedia of Samoa*, Sydney, 1907, 14.
5. LMS South Seas Reports, 59th Annual Report of the Malua Institution, 1903; LMS South Seas Letters, Hills to Lenwood, 28 Jun, 1917; Sibree to Lenwood, 21 Mar, 1918; J.W. Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa: The Emergence of the Independent State of Western Samoa*, Melbourne, 1967, 79-88.
6. "Samoa Historical Notes," Mar, 1935 (Island Territories Ex 2/15, National Archives Wellington); LMS South Seas Odds, "II.A. Hough Report on Samoa, 1909, - (Lauati and Mau).
7. Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa*, Suva, 1987, 51.
8. *Ibid.*, 51, 83.
9. LMS South Seas Letters, Fono Tele to Directors of LMS, 4 Jun, 1916.
10. LMS, South Seas Letters, Hough to Lenwood, 12 Dec, 1918; Hough to Lenwood, 2 Dec, 1918; Cane to Lenwood, 16 Dec, 1918; LMS South Seas Reports, 73rd Annual Report of the Malua Institution, 1917; *The Star*, "Samoa and Chinese," 22 Nov, 1935, Westbrook .Papers., MS Papers 0061-098, Turnbull Library, Wellington.
11. Some of these issues are discussed by T.T.T. Efi in a speech to the Pacific Studies Conference, University of Canterbury, 1992: "Conflicts, and Continuities: New Zealand - Samoa Relations," in T.T.T. Efi, *Englising My Samoa*, Suva, 1995.
12. LMS South Seas Reports, Perkins to Chirgwin, Report 1929, 31 Dec, 1929.
13. Ben F. Liua'ana, "Dragon in a Little Paradise," *Journal of Pacific History*, forthcoming.
14. Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 405.
15. *Ibid.*, 359.
16. *Ibid.*, 177-8.
17. Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, in response to the Prime Minister's Address at Apia,, on the VAGST protest in 1994. (Tape and Typescript in possession of the author). This mentality was also reflected in T.T.T. Efi's speech on New Year's day, 1980, in which the *Mau* was again put forth as the reason for Western Samoa's independence T.T.T. Efi, "Ne'i Mea Ane Ua Galo," Speech given on New Year's Day, 1980, Station 2AP, Apia, Western Samoa. See Tupua Tamasese Efi, *Ua Fa'agaganaina Oe e le Atua Fetalai*, Apia, 1989, 24.
18. Speech by Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, in response to the Prime Minister's Address at Apia, on the VAGST protest in 1994; *Samoa Observer*, "Tumua and Pule Set Up Office....," 31 Mar, 1994.
19. Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 132.
20. *Ibid.*, 187.
21. LMS South Seas Letters, Feather to Barradale, 28 May, 1928; Hough and Parker to Barradale, 8 Oct, 1928; Bartlett to G.E. Phillips, 9 Dec, 1930; LMS South Seas Odds, H. Darvill to Barradale, 25 May, 1927.
22. Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 337.
23. *Ibid.*, 330.
24. *Ibid.*, 331.
25. *Ibid.*, 338.

## From the New Hebrides to Vanuatu

David Ambrose, ANU

Whatever the evils of colonisation, at independence most colonised people inherited a functional social and economic infrastructure in the form of roads, schools, ports and airstrips, hospitals and health clinics, a public administration, a police and justice system, to enumerate only some of the more obvious features of colonial regimes. Their degree of development may have varied with the colonising power, the duration of its occupation and the number of its nationals resident in the colony, the promotion and protection of whose interests often conditioned the strength of metropolitan commitment to the future of a possession. The appropriateness of the imported norms and values and the compatibility of the structures and systems imposed on indigenous communities are, of course, other matters.

The tragedy of Vanuatu's 'colonial' history is that in an era of colonisation throughout the Pacific it was not properly 'colonised' by any one colonial power, but fell under the condominium sway of the imperial rivalry of both Britain and France. To the British and French governments, their agreement to joint administration and not to seek to establish any exclusive or predominant influence must have seemed an act of enlightened forbearance. For Vanuatu, however, the agreement precluded the development of an extensive and unified infrastructure as each side maintained a watching brief over the activities of the other to ensure no surreptitious attempt to erode its interests or pre-emptively to advance its own. This punctilious observance of exact balance was typified, comically, by the precision with which the Union Jack and the Tricolour were simultaneously raised and lowered in a ceremony repeated twice every day.<sup>1</sup>

The legacy of that decision has been, almost without qualification, disastrous for the country and its preparation for sovereignty. It was early seen as such by indigenous champions of independence:

*The condominium system was the most out-dated and confused form of government that mankind has ever established on earth. It did not fulfil the requirements of a developing country like the New Hebrides. ... the condominium government was more of an obstacle to the economic and political 'development' of the New Hebrides than an agent for the preparation of New Hebrideans to become rulers of their own country. ... there were in fact three governments trying to govern the place, the French colonial administration, the British colonial administration and the Joint administration.*<sup>2</sup>

The absurdities and the divisiveness inherent in this system led to its characterization as 'pandemonium', the antithesis of good order and government. At its worst, it created and later bequeathed to the new nation an inheritance of two sets of laws, two police forces, two education systems, two administrations at central and district levels and two post offices, a situation exacerbated by the super-imposed Joint administration whose Gilbert and Sullivan-esque epitome was the Joint Court, presided over by a Spanish judge who 'could not speak English, barely understood French, knew no Melanesian, was bewildered by pidgin and was as deaf as a post'.<sup>3</sup> As Grace Mera Molisa poignantly noted, 'If it weren't my country and my people I would consider it the greatest farce the South Pacific scene has to offer the rest of the world. This farce is our tragedy.'<sup>4</sup> This hybrid administration, which may represent *the* most egregious sport of colonial governance, was aggravated by major differences between Britain and France towards their interests and responsibilities in the New Hebrides.

In the late 19th century, the British government, responding reluctantly to the precatons of the Protestant Churches in Australia which feared the alienation of agricultural land by French planters and the steady inroads of the Catholic missions, assumed some policing duties with France under

the Joint Naval Commission of 1887. Britain's unwillingness to contest an exclusive rule in the New Hebrides with France and its ultimate acquiescence in the Protocols of 1914, establishing the condominium, mirrored the wish of the British Treasury to contain its financial commitments to the barest minimum. Hence Britain's investment in the New Hebrides was from the outset shallow and its disposition to divest itself of responsibilities was, as the 20th century rolled on, consonant with the movement towards independence for its colonies which gathered pace after World War II.

The interests of France were, however, more strongly entrenched through the large land holdings of settlers, notably John Higginson's Compagnie Caledonienne des Nouvelles Hebrides (CCNH), and the incorporation of French 'colonies' as territories of the French state. From the 1960s, moreover, independence for the New Hebrides came increasingly to be considered in the light of its impact on continued French presence in New Caledonia and French Polynesia. De Gaulle's strategic policy and France's nuclear test program thus became obstacles to independence for the New Hebrides because of a feared 'domino' effect.<sup>5</sup> De Gaulle's attitude to decolonisation for the New Hebrides became the cardinal policy guidance for the French Residency in Port Vila, although strict belief in it as a means to ensure their longer-term objectives seems to have varied between individual French Resident Commissioners. In a confidential report to the French government in 1969, the Resident Commissioner, M. Mouradian, was quite explicit about his mission:

*French Policy*

*A - Government Policy - This is clear. My instructions received from General de Gaulle, were: "we are staying".*

*B - French Residency's Policy - This is simply the application of this order.<sup>6</sup>*

Only two years later, Commissioner Langlois, evinced far less confidence:

*Although the demonstration held for about two hours by just a few dozen natives was absolutely calm, its impact on the Europeans was gripping. Unable to believe that natives could adopt an attitude that had not been dictated to them, the European population pinned this fear down to the activity of the British Residency, the Presbyterian Mission, the Anglicans, etc... .*

*Certain Europeans, ... think that it is time to organize young Melanesians into political groupings would which permit the inevitable evolution of their behaviour to be guided. ... I fear that they delude themselves with illusions and I rather believe that these political regroupings which will certainly take place will be undertaken by the natives themselves, as soon as a small thinking elite will have been formed. All we hope for is that this elite will be Francophone, trained in our own way of thinking.<sup>7</sup>*

His use of the royal 'we' and his faintly despairing 'hope' certainly did not represent official DOMTOM policy nor the expectations of the several thousand French settlers whose large land-holdings and their increasing sub-division for sale to expatriates was the immediate cause of the public demonstration (more properly a peaceful 'sit-in') referred to above by M. Langlois.

### **Indigenous Political Opposition**

The one, perhaps the only, unmixed blessing to come out of the contested decade of 'decolonisation' in the New Hebrides was the gradual emergence during the 1970s of a new political culture firmly rooted in mass organisation and the populist cause of national independence. Party-based politics in Vanuatu has been characteristic of the period since independence in 1980 and has distinguished the practice of parliamentary government there from most of its Melanesian neighbours. Recent years may suggest that this is now unravelling and that Vanuatu is reverting to a more normal *type*, in which individuals exploit short-term opportunities for personal or narrow constituency advantage with no sense of national interest or of the responsibilities of public office. It may be so, but I am not yet despairing of the resilience of the party system there. Despite the internal schisms that have

riven it since 1988, and more especially since 1991, the Vanua'aku Party has managed to retain much of its grass-roots party structure and commitment to principle and party policy. If politics degenerates further into individual opportunism, people may revert to a party that stands for and by something. If too the reconciliation between Fr Lini's National United Party and Donald Kalpokas and the Vanua'aku Party (VP) holds, it should tend to consolidate a bloc of popular and parliamentary support sufficient to begin to marginalise the present leverage of individual MPs ready to hawk their allegiances to the highest bidders.

The first organised opposition to European exploitation of alienated land arose on the island of Espiritu Santo in the 1960s as planters began to move away from their coastal plantations to open up tracts of interior 'dark bush' for cattle grazing. Custom owners of the land denied that any title could have been acquired to such land as it was inconceivable that permanent alienation could ever have been agreed. Their objections gave rise on Santo to the rural custom movement Nagriamel, led by the colourful Jimmy Steven, which initiated the first tentative moves internationally in the direction of independence for the New Hebrides, more to achieve local goals than from any sense of a national cause. Similar problems and frustrations elsewhere, especially on Malekula and Efate, served to raise ni-Vanuatu awareness of their own powerlessness to influence decisions over their most basic inheritance 'land'. Political power, it was soon realised, was the essential pre-requisite to being able even to participate in determining their own future for themselves.

A chronology of the 70s is a record of the growth of political parties whose platforms were to greater or lesser degrees either for retention of the status quo or in favour of independence - though the concerted demand for independence grew incrementally out of initial demands for a voice in the decision-making processes of the condominium government and an impatience with the denial of what was felt to be adequate consultation on issues affecting indigenous people. The first and most important event was the formation in June 1971 of the New Hebrides Cultural Association by Donald Kalpokas, Fr Walter Lini and Fr John Bani which soon after transformed itself into the New Hebrides National Party (NHNP). The Association commenced publication of a newspaper *New Hebrides View Points* 'to raise awareness among the Melanesian population of issues affecting the development of their country, in particular the large-scale alienation of land and the present government set-up "which provides little hope of getting things done in the interests of the New Hebrideans"'.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the same year and in reaction to the NHNP, a new largely francophone party, the *Union de la Population des Nouvelles Hebrides* (UPNH), was formed with support principally from European plantation owners and commercial interests. It failed to attract much support among Melanesians because its lack of genuine concern for ni-Vanuatu interests was quickly apparent.

If the return to the New Hebrides in 1970/71 from overseas studies by Lini, Bani and Kalpokas was crucial to the founding of the NHNP, the return in 1973/74 of Barak Sope and Kalkot Matas Kelekele was critical to the party's transformation into an effective national organization with a defined political agenda. Sope had commented in 1973 that 'the party had no definite policies for the achievement of its objectives' and recognised that this arose mainly from a lack of organization and human resources dedicated to the cause.<sup>9</sup> He saw that land was a unifying issue which could assist in mobilising popular support:

'For the New Hebrides land is also a tool that can help to bridge the educated-uneducated and the urban-rural gaps'.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly the Party decided at its Congress in Jan 1974 to centralize its operations in Pt Vila, elected Fr Lini as a full-time President (on leave from the Anglican Church), Barak Sope as Secretary and Kalkot as full-time information officer and publicist.

The Churches too began to intervene politically and in 1973 the Presbyterian Assembly passed a resolution endorsing progress towards independence. Within a few months, Fr Lini petitioned the UN Committee of 24 calling for independence by 1977.

As a party the UPNH was effectively supplanted by the *Union des Communautés des Nouvelles Hébrides* (UCNH) in 1974 along the linguistic divide between French and English speakers. Although several prominent ni-Vanuatu francophones had been invited to attend the NPNH Congress two weeks earlier, two were elected Vice-President and Secretary of the new party. A third, Vincent Boulekone, attributed his preference for UCNH to the language divide: 'The National Party was born on the English side and it therefore influenced the Anglophones. The Francophone Melanesians were not interested in this, and didn't understand too well why (it) had been born'.<sup>11</sup>

A second francophone party the *Mouvement Autonomiste des Nouvelles Hébrides* (MANH) emerged in Jan 1974 which while it also represented francophone *colon* interests felt itself remote from the dominance of Pt Vila and nursed the germs of a separatist sentiment, already inchoate in the thinking of the Nagriamel movement, into political consciousness by espousal of a move towards 'autonomous status' for different regional units. On Santo, it quickly allied itself with Nagriamel which gave it grass-root Melanesian support, in an alliance which may be seen to have buttressed secessionist inclinations which erupted in violence on the eve of Vanuatu's independence in 1980.

By the end of 1974, both Britain and France agreed that a graduated transition to independence must be undertaken with the first step to be elections to a Representative Assembly in Nov 1975. The elections returned 55% of the Melanesian vote to the NP and 17 of the 29 universal suffrage seats contested.<sup>12</sup> Disputed returns and by-elections delayed the first sitting until November 1976 and after a tied vote in February 1977 the newly renamed Vanua'aku Party decided to boycott the Assembly for good as totally unrepresentative. As a result, the administering powers dissolved the Assembly and, ignoring VP demands for democratic elections and majority rule, proceeded with elections on 29 Nov 1977 for another Representative Assembly. A new Assembly was declared elected on 28 Nov without a vote, after a sharing arrangement had been worked out between the other parties.<sup>13</sup>

Immediately a VP People's Provisional Government took control of much of the country preventing entry to the British and French authorities through their control of most airstrips and landing places. Movement into and within many islands was not possible without PPG permits. The VP suspended the PPG in May 78 after agreement had been reached with the administering powers and other parties leading to the formation of a government of National Unity in December 78. The council of Ministers appointed a Constitutional Planning Committee which comprised representatives from all political parties, chiefs, churches and women. Its decisions were to be made by consensus and the Constitution it proposed was accepted by the French and British in September 1979. Elections were set down for November.

The results of those elections stunned the French and the francophones - the size of the VP majority, with 26 out of 39 seats and 62% of the vote on a 92% turn-out<sup>14</sup>, was large enough to allow the Anglophone majority unilaterally to amend the constitution. As it had not yet agreed to a date for independence, France sought to unpick some of the agreements during negotiations over the issue and the question of aid. It was not until only one month before independence that France finally agreed to the date of 30th July.

### Secession

Santo's rebellion on the eve of independence and its decisive suppression, with assistance from PNG's Kumal force, by the new Lini government may have been reported with amusement as the 'coconut war' but it posed a serious threat to Vanuatu's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Certainly that was believed by the leading members of the government. Lini wrote in 'Beyond Pandemonium',

*The government and people of the New Hebrides have seen the French supporting and encouraging the rebels on Santo and Tanna. They have supplied weapons and ammunition and received support from the rebels in return.*<sup>15</sup>

*Inspector-General Robert told the meeting that he did not care if civil war broke out in the NH. ... M.Dijoud appeared on TV and radio ... and encouraged French nationals and 'colons' to continue their activities against the legally elected government...*

As a consequence, as Jupp observed in 1982, French resistance produced the very outcome they most feared - '*one party domination by the Anglophone Protestants*'.<sup>16</sup>

On the positive side, the struggle for independence created a national political party organisation and, in reaction, other parties arose in opposition to its agenda. The struggle also engendered some sense of nationhood in an archipelago where topography, language and custom militated against such a notion. It early gave Vanuatu an international profile through the UN Decolonisation Committee and a foreign policy based on membership of the NAM. It gave Vanuatu an independent 'identity' from the outset. It is perhaps wrong to say 'gave', for very little was given; rather they won for themselves those things. On the negative side the list is heavy. For a poor country to assume responsibility for education, health and other services is a major challenge, even when preparation has been long and smooth. But to support two systems is beyond capabilities.

From Vanuatu's history of dual administration flowed, especially from its divided education and unequal employment in rival systems, but reinforced by religious affiliation, the most profound and intractable schism - the divide between the anglophone majority and a large francophone minority. Despite the almost universal use of Bislama, the problem persists. Carlot-Korman, after winning government in 1991, saw it as not only an opportunity but also a responsibility to redress the discrimination and disadvantages he and the francophone community felt they had endured under a decade of anglophone rule. The taste for power, driven now as much by the desire to prevent its exercise by a rival as by any commitment to a program, together with the vagaries of unstable coalition government have begun to undermine that legacy of policy coherence and party discipline that Vanuatu won for itself through a nationalist struggle for independence.

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2. Barak Sope, 'The Colonial History of the New Hebrides', in Lini, *op. cit.*, 17-18.
3. Richard Shears, *The Coconut War*, Melbourne, 1980, in David Robie, *Blood on their Banner*, 69.
4. Grace Molisa, in Chris Plant (ed.), *New Hebrides The Road to Independence*, Suva 1977, 13.
5. Howard Van Trease, *Melanesian Politics Stael blong Vanuatu*, Suva 1995, 15.
6. *Ibid.*, 454.
7. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
8. VP files, quoted in *Ibid.*, 21.
9. Barak Sope, *Land and Politics in the New Hebrides*, Suva 1974, quoted in Van Trease *op.cit.*
10. *Ibid.*, quoted in Van Trease, *The Politics of Land in Vanuatu*, Suva, 1987, 210.
11. Vincent Boulekone, 'UCNIH', in Plant, *op. cit.*, 47
12. Van Trease, *Land and Politics in Vanuatu*, 229.
13. Van Trease, *Melanesian Politics*, 37.
14. Lini, *op.cit.*, 29.
15. *Ibid.*, 53-4.
16. James Jupp, *Custom, Tradition and Reform in Vanuatu Politics*, quoted in Ken Ross, *Prospects for Crisis Prediction*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No 65 ANU 1990.

### No wantem kap man:

### Decolonisation and rebellion in the New Hebrides, 1957-1980.

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After 74 years of Condominium rule the New Hebrides emerged into the community of states as Vanuatu on 30 July 1980. Yet at independence, the country was in the throes of a rebellion. In January 1980, secessionists in the southern and northern regions of the archipelago had declared independent federations, refusing to submit to the authority of the Vanua'aku Pati which had been swept to power in the November 1979 elections. Although the secession in the southern regions had been suppressed in the month before independence, the northern rebels, constituted mainly by the Nagriamel movement and backed by French settlers, members of the French administration and the Phoenix Foundation, continued to hold power. Unable, or unwilling, to limit disintegrating law and order, the colonial administrations of the United Kingdom and France could only preside over the chaos.

After independence the VP administration, freed from the shackles of the bifurcated Condominium, quickly reasserted its authority. With the help of the Papua New Guinean Kumul Force, the remaining secessionists were suppressed and the leaders of the rebellion arrested. The human costs of the revolt were minimal: only two rebels had been killed and a handful wounded, some quite seriously. Many of the survivors were to face harsh conditions in Vanuatu's ill-equipped jails or at the hands of police.<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath, almost a thousand people were detained, over one-hundred, including the French Resident Commissioner, were designated *persona non grata*, and Jimmy Moli Stevens, leader of the Nagriamel movement was sentenced to fourteen and a half years imprisonment.<sup>2</sup>

The role played by members of the French colonial administration in the rebellion, and the perception that the metropolitan French government was either sympathetic or actively involved, initiated a downturn in relations between France and Vanuatu which were not to recover properly for over ten years. More serious for the harmony of the new state was the continuing air of distrust concerning Francophone niVanuatu.<sup>3</sup> Many leaders of the rebellion were prominent Francophones, such as Jean Marie L     and Aim     Mal    , and perceptions of their attempts to delay or derail independence pervaded Vanuatu politics for some time. The new state had emerged intact, but only just. In the words of one observer, it was a 'sorely troubled run-up to freedom'.<sup>4</sup>

Because of these factors the rebellion has often been understood as the result of 'outside influences who use Melanesian people in order to promote their own interests and achieve their own aims'<sup>5</sup>. Thus, fearful of a nationalist and progressive Vanua'aku Pati administration, French settlers and colonial officials manipulated indigenous movements with the intention of resisting decolonisation in Santo and other parts of the New Hebrides. The Phoenix Foundation, intent on establishing a *laissez faire* paradise based on right-wing libertarian principles was also interested in separating Santo from the rest of the New Hebrides (although its actual role in the rebellion was limited). The situation was compounded by an

*inept Condominium system of government which allowed such a situation to develop but was too paralysed by its in-built restrictions to do anything effective to resolve it ...*<sup>6</sup>

Considering the activities of these 'outside influences' and the vacillation of the metropolitan powers in the face of disintegrating order, such an interpretation has considerable salience. However, it accepts, *fait accompli*, that many niVanuatu were either incapable of acting in their own self-perceived interests or were more interested in remaining French than niVanuatu. Moreover, by emphasising the activities of the French administration, French settlers and Francophone rebels, the political scene in Vanuatu

is conveniently demarcated into Anglophone (good, decolonisers) and Francophone (bad, pro-colonial) camps. The reality was rarely so simple. Many of those who participated in the rebellion had previously opposed the French government and the activities of French settlers and were not necessarily Francophones nor even Francophiles.

While the balkanisation of the New Hebrides was demonstrably the intention of the *métis*, members of the French administration and the Phoenix Foundation, little insight has been offered into why thousands of niVanuatu took part. To suggest that they could be incited into secession by a handful of expatriates seems condescending. Sixteen years later, it is necessary to reassess the rebellion and by implication the nature of resistance to decolonisation.

### **Wiswe? Indigenous responses to the devolution of power.**

Neither driven from the islands by advancing armies nor initially challenged by an indigenous intelligentsia, the United Kingdom and France did not begin to devolve power in the New Hebrides until the late 1950s. Due to the presence of two colonial powers, one declining and one determined not to do so, decolonising the New Hebrides was unavoidably problematic. Yet despite the differences between Britain and France, one of the most important, and frequently overlooked, divisions was in the reaction to constitutional reform from islanders themselves.

In 1957 the Condominium administration legislated to provide both an advisory body and system of local councils<sup>7</sup>. While the formation of an advisory council for territory-wide discussion was relatively easy, grass-roots reform had to contend with New Hebridean reservations about the nature of government and the specifics of island divisions. The Native Local Administration Joint Regulation in September 1957 provided the basis for the establishment of local councils to provide infrastructure for law and order, water supplies and sanitation.<sup>8</sup> Although funded by the treasury of the Condominium, local councils were mainly supported by the British administration. Debilitated by a disparate population, poor communication infrastructure, limited funding, poor training and Condominium ambivalence, the local council system was never to properly take hold before independence. Despite continued calls from the New Hebridean members in AdCo, local councils were not made mandatory and were never provided with the ability to raise independent capital.<sup>9</sup> At its zenith, the local council system accounted for less than half of the islands. In addition to the barriers of geography and administrative support, there is evidence to suggest that French District Agents advocated rejection of the councils to Francophone niVanuatu, as they were not complimentary with the French model of communes based on common language and ethnic ties.<sup>10</sup> However, islanders had ample reasons to reject infrastructural reform.

The colonial period had installed the central authority of the Joint Administration onto the autonomous villages of the New Hebrides.<sup>11</sup> However, while power radiated from Port Vila, it was rarely felt in many islands. Apart from infrequent visits from government officials, survey teams and missionaries, communities were mostly ignored by the Joint Administration. When agents of the Joint Administration had concerned themselves with island affairs, it had often been to 'collect licence money or to cart wrong-doers off to prison'.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, a bifurcated colonial administration in which the two halves were often operating in competition rather than cooperation, left many islanders afraid of being caught between the hammer of the French and the anvil of the British. The localisation of government therefore was greeted with understandable trepidation by many New Hebrideans, mindful at once of the punitive relationship that they had had with the Joint Administration and wishing to avoid involvement in the operation of all government. In many instances, islanders made little differentiation between the French and British sides of the administration, simply perceiving the 'kapman' (government) in negative terms.<sup>13</sup> Contiguous with such negative perceptions, local councils were thought to undermine the authority of chiefs and big-men.<sup>14</sup> It is to the detriment of the Joint Administration, and especially the British half, that the role of local councils was never properly outlined to island communities. Nevertheless, even had this happened, it is doubtful that all islanders would have accepted local councils. The traditional consensus model of leadership in which an issue



was argued until all parties were in agreement was still preferred in many quarters.<sup>15</sup> A system which necessitated election by ballot or nomination and which met in private was inappropriate because one person, it was thought, could not speak for another, especially behind closed doors. The successful implementation of local councils required a significant alteration of New Hebridean attitudes to government.

Adoption of local councils was often dictated by specific island rivalries. The formation of an island council in Tanna in 1968 was derailed by the long-standing feud between the Presbyterian church and the 'cargo-cultist' and pagan villages.<sup>16</sup> The Jon Frum movement had consistently opposed government encroachment onto its territory, guarding its boundaries with quasi-military border patrols and refusing the services of government clinics and schools.<sup>17</sup> The main impetus for the council had come from Iolu Abbil, a Presbyterian member of AdCo, and meetings were to be held on the grounds of the Presbyterian mission headquarters. To Jon Frum adherents, it was largely perceived that the Presbyterian Church was the agent of their repression. The island council therefore compounded two bugbears: government and the repression of *kastom* (at least the cargo-cultist perceptions of it).

While local councils were generally more accepted in Anglophone and Protestant communities, it was not necessarily the case that only Francophone communities opposed them. When the idea of local councils was introduced to Ambae in 1961, the most disinclined community was that of the Church of Christ based in Ndui Ndui, West Ambae. In the eastern section, councils found support in the Melanesian Mission and Apostolic communities, as well as in Catholic villages (although not all were to remain involved).<sup>18</sup> Not only was the Church of Christ community considered Anglophone, but in 1959, two years before the introduction of the Local Council issue, it had spearheaded moves to stop the establishment of a French school on the island.<sup>19</sup> The machinations of the French District Agent in this respect were also perceived as undue government interference. Ambae was recognised for the efficient operation of its local councils. However, the refusal of the Church of Christ to participate, when compared with the successes of those who had accepted the *rod blong kapman* (government way), constituted a considerable loss of face for the big-men of Ndui Ndui.<sup>20</sup> It was not always the case that the differences between Britain and France over decolonisation were necessarily transposed into an essential clash between Anglophone and Francophone niVanuatu.

Poor administrative support, conflicting colonial policies, reservations as to the scope and functions of the local councils and a divided community created unease and incomprehension. It was assumed that islanders should recognise political advance when it was offered, and graciously accept it. However, this was not the case and considering the negative perception of the government, that was understandable. The Condominium's assurance that the reforms were 'warmly welcomed by the people of the New Hebrides', was only partly true.<sup>21</sup>

### **No wantem kapman    The Nagriamel alternative.**

In the early 1960s British subject Jimmy Stevens and local big-man Tari Paul Buluk formed the Nagriamel movement in Santo to protest the encroachment of the Société Française des Nouvelles Hébrides onto the *dak bus* (dark bush - alienated, but unused land).<sup>22</sup> Although initially protesting a specific example of land alienation, Nagriamel quickly grew into a movement spanning the northern islands of Espiritu Santo, Ambae, Pentecost, Maewo, Malekula, Malo, Paama and Ambrym. In 1968, Europeans constituted only three percent of the population, yet they held title to thirty-six percent of all land in the islands, and fifty percent of all exploited land.<sup>23</sup> A group advocating the return of *dak bus* therefore had considerable common ground with grassroots New Hebrideans.

Nagriamel benefited from broad disenchantment with the Condominium. Islanders looking for an alternative to the two-headed administration were drawn to the unity provided by the new movement. As a New Hebridean member of AdCo paraphrased it, a common belief was that islanders 'could not serve two masters, therefore [they] prefer Nagriamel ...'<sup>24</sup>

Part of Nagriamel's appeal was that it was an indigenous movement and islanders could identify with it more than they could the Joint Administration, or even the Advisory Council.<sup>25</sup> Nagriamel's popularity threatened the authority of the Condominium in the northern islands and its actions became increasingly anti-government. Representatives also toured the northern islands advocating withdrawal from local councils.<sup>26</sup> Tanafo village, the movement headquarters, became an anti-government commune. Nagriamel opposed all Joint Administration encroachment in its territories. Border patrols were initiated in Tanafo and access to Nagriamel lands in other areas was limited to those possessing a 'passport'.<sup>27</sup> Field workers for 1971 Geological Survey in Santo, Ambae and Epi were hindered or stopped by Nagriamel supporters and survey marker pegs removed.<sup>28</sup>

The movement reached its apogee in the early 1970s. Drawn together under the Nagriamel banner were niVanuatu from the Santo hinterland (the *mamal* or *nekid pipol* - naked people), adherents of the Church of Christ from Ambae, Catholics from Port Olry and Matantas in Santo, Santo Presbyterians (who were later break away from Nagriamel to form Natuitanno) and many other islanders disenchanted with the Condominium. Nagriamel's syncretism was apparent in the increasingly complex symbols of allegiance that Stevens used - a mixture of traditional rites and Christian practice.<sup>29</sup> Jimmy Stevens claimed fifteen thousand Melanesian adherents.<sup>30</sup> Although this number is hard to verify, Nagriamel presented a significant challenge in the northern islands.

The apparent success of Nagriamel, and the tenuous position of the local councils, led the New Hebridean members of Advisory Council to push for greater emphasis upon local government. In 1970, at an extraordinary session, a motion sponsored by the representative for South Efate, George Kalkoa, and receiving support from ten of the other eleven New Hebridean members, sponsored a motion calling on the Joint Administration to give more support to the local councils.<sup>31</sup> It was also unanimously agreed to make all efforts to limit the influence of Nagriamel.<sup>32</sup> Despite such measures, Nagriamel remained a force in New Hebridean politics for another ten years.

### **Tru kastom mo gammon.**

#### **Kastom and politics.**

In response to an upsurge in political activism in the early seventies, the governments of the United Kingdom and France continued to devolve power. Beginning with a National Representative Assembly in 1975 and culminating in free and open elections in 1979, the last five years of Condominium rule were marked by the rapid devolution of power and heightened tensions. Although the period was marked by rivalry between the colonial powers, it was the clash between New Hebrideans - physical and doctrinaire - that were the most heated.

By the early 1970s, conditions were ripe for an explosion of political activity. As extensive land speculation by American property developers renewed concern about land alienation, a new political force emerged.<sup>33</sup> The New Hebrides Cultural Society, formed in 1971, sought to revive culture and advance the interests of New Hebrideans.<sup>34</sup> Its first action was to organise demonstrations against the latest round of land speculation, and received sufficient support to transform itself into the New Hebrides National Party. Its platform was based on the return of customary land, unity, development, decentralisation and ultimately, independence. Like Nagriamel, the National Party also offered an alternative to the divisiveness of the Condominium administration, but whereas Nagriamel rejected all forms of government, the National Party merely rejected government's current form.

Within three years of the formation of the National Party, two urban Francophone parties had emerged. The first was the Mouvement Autonomiste des Nouvelles Hébrides (MANH) in Santo formed in 1973, which drew its support from French settlers and Francophone New Hebrideans. Its platform was explicitly Santo-oriented, seeking autonomy for the island to protect its commercial interests from Vila. The second was the Union des Communautés de Nouvelles Hébrides (UCNH) formed in Port Vila in 1974. The platform of UCNH was less specific than that of MANH, but it also drew significant support

from urban French and Francophone New Hebrideans. Both were vilified by the National Party as parties of the 'foreign planter community' and pro-colonial.<sup>35</sup>

Although it seemed that the lands policies of the Nagriamel movement and the National Party, both of which called for the return of alienated land, would draw the two groups together, Nagriamel allied itself with MANH. It seemed anomalous that a group which had begun in protest at the alienation of *dak bus* by French commercial interests would ally itself with a party which drew considerable support from these groups, but Stevens was adamant that Nagriamel should maintain its anti-government stance. As he later stated,

*the feeling was that most of their (National Party) members were Local Council members. Nagriamel is against government and therefore against Local Councils, and so we are against the National Party. We didn't want to get pulled back into government.*<sup>36</sup>

The alliance between MANH and Nagriamel facilitated an increasing political role for Stevens. Although it seemed contrary to his avowed anti-government ethic, his participation in politics was admissible as it allowed him to voice his concerns to a wider audience. Nevertheless, he maintained that politics and government were to be kept out of Tanafo completely.<sup>37</sup> The alliance between MANH and Nagriamel, and a similar alliance between the UCNH and Tanna's *kastom* groups, provided the urban Francophone parties with grass-roots support that they could otherwise not mobilise.

The smooth transition to self-government faltered after the 1975 elections. Dissatisfied with the slow rate of reform, the National Party boycotted most sittings of the National Representative Assembly, and eventually removed itself from the government sanctioned process altogether, forming the People's Provisional Government in 1977. The action sparked rioting in Vila and Tanna, and imposed a siege mentality on the islands which was not to lift until after 1980.<sup>38</sup> While it was true that on a national level there was a division of power between the National Assembly/Joint Administration and the People's Provisional Government, in two significant areas power was divided between *kastom* groups and the PPG.<sup>39</sup> Santo and Ambae were divided between Nagriamel and Vanua'aku Pati communities.<sup>40</sup> In Tanna the fortification was between Jon Frum/Kapiel villages and Vanua'aku Pati villages.<sup>41</sup> Beneath the conflicts on a national level, island divisions were still being played out by followers of the 'government way' and those who rejected it.

The mobilisation of the political parties required the cooptation of indigenous symbols to cement voter support. *Kastom*<sup>42</sup> was an obvious counterpoint to the injustices of the Condominium regime and rooted politics to the islands, rather than to the Residencies. *Kastom*, and the ability to impose of acceptable interpretation of it, was the major point of the political legitimacy in New Hebrides politics. Heated arguments had arisen between New Hebrideans as to *tru kastom* (the real thing) and *gammon* (rubbish).<sup>43</sup> To Nagriamel, Jon Frum and Kapiel, *kastom* was an implicit political structure. It entailed the construction of regional autonomy as part of *kastom* and placed little credence in the concept of the nation-state. At the village level power rested in the village big-men and chiefs and it was they who had the power to make decisions about, for example, independence.<sup>44</sup> To the Vanua'aku Pati *kastom* was a common tradition through which islanders could feel a common bond. Although it had invariably been altered by many factors, not least Christianity, it was a force for national unity growing from pride in the diversity and wealth of the islands' traditions<sup>45</sup>.

The delineation between the two groups was clear. While heavily laden with references to *kastom*, the political discourse of the Vanua'aku Pati also involved concepts such as emancipation, the endemic inequality of colonialism and exploitation<sup>46</sup>. They looked beyond the boundaries of 'village' and 'island', championed the concept of the nation-state. Nagriamel, Jon Frum and Kapiel preferred the insularity of individual communities and the maintenance of a system of autonomous villages, loosely collected in a federation.

Both interpretations were ultimately reconstructed versions of *kastom*, and could hardly be otherwise.

There was the obvious influence of consistent outside forces on the islands and subsequently on *kastom*. The idea of island autonomy, whilst allowing more *kastom*-oriented activities in the villages, was itself a construction. While there was no concept of a unified New Hebrides, there was also little concept of unified islands. Regional autonomy, especially in Santo and Tanna, was particularly attractive to the *kastom* adherents because in the microcosm of island relations, Vanua'aku could not claim a clear majority (which it could demonstrably do on a national level). Therefore, if those two islands could be granted more powers of self-determination, the anti-Vanua'aku forces could live out their collective existences without the fear of having government imposed on them.

The November 1979 elections - the first open elections contested by *all* the parties - resulted in a resounding victory for Vanua'aku, claiming 26 of the 39 seats in the assembly, and winning slim majorities in both regional council elections in Santo and Tanna. The loss of the island councils marked the turning point from which rebellion was almost unavoidable. The regional councils were the last chance of maintaining even limited autonomy for the Federal Pati, and especially the Nagriamel movement and the Tannese *kastom* villages, and the last chance of avoiding the Vanua'aku Pati's vision of an independent state. As charges of fraud ricocheted across the islands, all but three of the Vanua'aku Pati's opponents boycotted the assembly. The remaining opposition members, the three Francophone niVanuatu with university education, constituted a vocal, but outnumbered opposition.

On 1 January 1980 the flags of the TAFEA and Vemarana Federations were raised. The structure of the rebel federation was, in the words of Jean Marie L    ,

*closely tied up with custom ..... the 1914 Protocol was never signed by our custom chiefs. We must go back to the way things were before the whites came. We will be free again by respecting our custom ..... We will recognise ... neither the political structure nor the social structure (of the Vanua'aku Pati government) ...* <sup>47</sup>

It measured the gulf between the rebel New Hebrideans and the Vanua'aku government. The VP sought to impose a unity on the islands, and drag the New Hebrides into nationhood. It had never opposed 'government' in substance, merely the form: that is the Condominium administration. The rebel leaders, especially Nagriamel in the northern islands and Jon Frum in the south, placed little credence in the notion of the nation-state, preferring the insularity of individual communities and the maintenance of autonomous villages, loosely collected in a federation. The place of such a system in the 1980s was unclear.

Once freed from the crippled Condominium administration, the Lini administration was able to reassert its authority. With the help of Papua New Guinea troops the Santo revolt was suppressed in a little over two weeks, with little resistance and no sign of foreign intervention on the part of the rebels.<sup>48</sup> Although the Phoenix Foundation was often cited as a main exponent of secession, by the late seventies its role was limited to the provision of coins and passports for the doomed Nagriamel federation.<sup>49</sup> In the end it was merely a 'peanut-gallery' hoping for a favourable outcome. The role of the French settlers and colonial administrators was more visible.

## Conclusion

The Santo rebellion, and its forceful suppression, were the tragic consequences of decolonisation. While the intentions of the Phoenix Foundation and the French settlers were indeed to derail independence, the objectives of Nagriamel and the cargo-cultists of Tanna were less sinister. The major niVanuatu parties were formed in response to the fact that the colonial period had brought very few benefits to the islands. Vanua'aku sought to redress the imbalance through gaining control of the apparatuses of government and bringing development and unity. However, for the rebels of the TAFEA and Vemarana Federations, Father Walter Lini and the Vanua'aku administration merely represented the latest manifestation of something that they had rejected completely: intrusive government. Nagriamel was originally an issue based movement, protesting a specific case of land alienation. Yet

the conditions in the Condominium and the difficult process of instituting local government in the sixties, pushed many islanders, Protestant and Catholic, Christian and animist into the Nagriamel fold, and facilitated its growth into an alternative non-government. In essence, the rebellion had been fought to maintain a system of autonomous villages, controlled through consensus in the (reformulated) traditional manner. The world-view of Nagriamel, and that of its niVanuatu allies, was never as sophisticated as the educated nationalists of the Vanua'aku Pati, and was intellectually ill-equipped to comprehend the potential for exploitation at the hands of either the *metis* or the Phoenix Foundation. However, the case remains that it was these forces which allowed Nagriamel to act without the entanglements of intrusive government.

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## Prospects for New Caledonia: The Challenge of Ouvea

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### The New Caledonia Background (Dorothy Shineberg, ANU)

New Caledonia (Territoire de la Nouvelle Calédonie) is a French overseas territory, 1,200km east of Australia. It includes the island of New Caledonia with the capital, Noumea; the Loyalty Islands; the Belep Islands and the Isle of Pines. These islands form more than 99% of the land mass of about 19,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Although New Caledonia has only about 150,000 inhabitants, it has acquired significance as an outpost of European sovereignty in a largely decolonised region.

The Grande Terre contains about 90% of the population. Rugged mountain ranges divide the island into an east 'coast' which often descends precipitously to the sea, and a west 'coast' which slopes more gradually and contains much undulating land. Serpentine rock forms a continuous plateau over most of the southern third of the island, and continues along the west coast as a series of massifs. These rocks have weathered to form the terre rouge soils which overlay extensive nickel, chrome and cobalt ores. In the north-east, an outcrop of gneiss forms a mountain range which includes the highest mountain, Mt Panié (1628 m). Numerous streams descend from the mountain chain to the lagoon. The climate is subtropical with a year-round rainfall which is higher on the east coast (up to 2m annually) than on the west. The Loyalty Islands comprise three main islands, Ouvéa, Lifou, Maré, and many small islands. Loyalties form more than 10% of the total land mass and nearly 10% of the population live there. These islands are raised coral plateaux, and surface water is lacking because of the porous rock. Geographical isolation, contrasting soils and a wide altitudinal range has produced a rich flora. There are no endemic malarial mosquitoes.

Melanesians settled the territory over 3,000 years ago and, except for rare Polynesian voyagers, were probably cut off from outside contact until the late 18th century. Captain Cook landed at Balade on the east coast, which he named New Caledonia, in 1774, and was followed in 1793 by the French navigator, D'Entrecasteaux. Regular contact with Europeans began in 1841 when sandalwood traders from Australia introduced islanders to iron. The arrival of a protestant mission from the London Missionary Society in the Loyalty Islands in 1841 and that of a Marist mission, set up at Balade with the aid of the French navy in 1843, marked the beginning of the protestant and catholic churches in the territory. France took possession of most of present day New Caledonia in 1853, with the aim of reserving the territory as a possible penal colony. French sovereignty over the Loyalty Islands was not declared until 1864.

The Melanesian population probably declined rapidly in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, Melanesians numbers were fairly stable until 1939, but doubled in the next 40 years. Migration is important in determining non-Melanesian numbers. The birth-rate is higher among Melanesians and Wallisians than among others, but infant mortality is high among Melanesians and life expectancy relatively low (male 59.3; female, 64.4). From the time of settlement until 1917, Melanesian uprisings were common and constantly feared by the authorities and settlers. The insurrection of 1856-9 near Noumea, as well as that of 1878 which extended along the west coast from Bouloupari to Poya, seriously endangered French occupation. Grievances centred around the confiscation of Melanesian lands, the foraging of settlers' cattle on their food gardens and, in 1917, the head tax. The repression of the first uprising established the pattern of French conquest: systematic destruction of villages and crops to bring the population to heel, the use of indigenous auxiliaries to fight their battles, the demand for unconditional surrender and the punishment of insurgents by deportation or execution and further confiscations. By 1860 French authority had been established over the southern third of the mainland and in the next decade policies were developed for

disposing of indigenous land, regrouping tribes and appointing tribal chiefs to represent the administration. By 1900, large areas of land had been alienated and the inhabitants relegated to reserves. Forced labour, limitations on travel, and curfews became the basis of a system of administrative law codified in 1887 as the *indigénat* (Native Regulations). In 1899 a head tax was levied on Melanesian men to oblige them to work for settlers and the government and, like the *indigénat*, remained in force until 1946.

Although the prime concern of the early colonial administration was the control of about 23,000 convicts landed between 1864 and 1897, the attraction of free settlers and the provision of cheap labour were also preoccupations. Between 1864 and 1939, some 60,000 indentured labourers were imported to construct public works, to work on plantations, ships, wharves and mines and in commerce and domestic service. These included ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Islanders (1865-1920), Vietnamese (1891-1939), Indonesians (1896-1939) and Japanese (1892-1921). Only a few remained after their contracts and, although few ex-convicts left the territory, not many established families. New Caledonia was also the unlikely home of 4000 political exiles of the 1871 Paris Commune, but few of the survivors stayed after being amnestied. The free white settlers came at first largely from members of the administration and armed forces, from Australia and New Zealand, and former sugar planters from Reunion. There were two later waves of free settlers in the 1890s and 1920s, encouraged to establish coffee and cotton, but by 1936 there were only 15,000 European residents by comparison with 29,000 Melanesians. After World War 2, the European population gradually increased by migration, but the main influx of white and Polynesian settlers occurred during the nickel boom of 1965-72, making Melanesians for the first time a minority.

About two-thirds of the population live in Noumea, which has the facilities of a French provincial city. About four-fifths of people of migrant origin, including Europeans, Polynesians and Asians, live there as against a quarter of the Melanesians. About three-quarters of Melanesians live outside Noumea in small, dispersed villages with few modern facilities, engaged chiefly in subsistence agriculture, based on yam, taro, sweet potato and banana. In the Loyalty Islands, the Isle of Pines, the Beleps, on the east coast and in the mountain ranges of the mainland the population is almost entirely Melanesian.

Melanesians and Europeans form 43% and 37% respectively of the population and sustain distinct ways of life, 'kanak' and 'caldoche', to one of which people of mixed descent tend to ascribe. Kanak identity is based on clan membership, a network of family alliances and specific land rights. The *caldoche* way of life is fully integrated into a money economy. The Polynesian minority comprises Wallis and Futuna Islanders (9%) and Tahitians (4%). Descendants of Indonesian and Vietnamese migrant workers form 4% and 2% respectively of the population and are now essentially an urban group.

About thirty Melanesian languages are spoken, most Melanesians being proficient in more than one. The Catholic church claims two-thirds of the population, including almost all European, Wallisian and Vietnamese and half the Melanesian and Tahitian minorities. Two protestant churches, the Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalties (Eglise Evangélique) and the Free Evangelical Church (Eglise Libre), cater for one-fifth of the population. Their members are almost entirely Melanesian. The protestant churches are completely indigenised and attentive to the social and political aspirations of Melanesians. The Catholic Church is indigenised only to a small extent and tends to remain aloof from social problems, but stresses the importance of dialogue.

The territory is typical of overseas French territories in having a highly dependent economy and a large tertiary sector. Exports, which consist almost entirely of partly refined nickel and nickel ore, cover about half the cost of imports. Half the territory's trade is with France. A quarter of its exports go to Japan but trade with Pacific neighbours is minor. The trade deficit is made up by funds from France, chiefly grants to the territorial budget and expenditures for health, education and the military and security forces, which accounts for about one-third of the gross domestic product. The administration, commerce and transport and services sectors contribute three-quarters of the GDP.



Although per capita GDP is one of the highest in the South Pacific, distribution is poor, Melanesian household revenues being on average only about a quarter of that of European households. The distribution of land on the mainland is very uneven. Although 35,000 Melanesians live by cultivating the land, two-thirds of the land is in the hands of European families, of whom only 1000 derive income from farming and barely 100 are engaged full-time in agriculture. Few Melanesians own businesses, are employed as executives or tradesmen or are members of the professions, areas of traditional European dominance. Among the official unemployed, they are twice as numerous as Europeans, a figure which neglects the many 'hidden' unemployed who have returned to their villages.

The weathering of serpentine rock provides the territory with 40% of the world's known deposits of nickel ore, as well as chrome, cobalt, iron and magnesium. The export of nickel ore, which has been mined since 1875, and of partly refined nickel from the Société Le Nickel foundry near Noumea, is subject to fluctuation. Hydroelectric power from Yate provides nearly half of the territory's energy.

Mining has caused enormous problems of soil erosion and stream pollution and has done little to improve rural living conditions. Local agricultural products meet barely half the territory's needs. Commercial agriculture has not succeeded in spite of efforts to establish sugar cane, cotton, rice, coffee and copra. Cattle raising, however, has persisted since European settlement. The production of coffee and copra was kept going after the World War 2 chiefly by Melanesians, diversifying into the money economy, but little is now exported. Tourism is an industry of potential importance. Good roads ring the mainland and the larger islands and traverse the central mountain range. There are excellent facilities for international and internal sea and air travel.

The territory is fully integrated into the French Republic, is subject to its laws and sends parliamentary representatives to Paris. As an overseas territory, however, special legislation is required to introduce laws for the government of the territory and in areas such as education, health and labour laws. Powers such as defence, internal security, immigration, justice, telecommunications and secondary and tertiary education are retained by the national government and administered by the French High Commissioner. The administration of territorial powers, covering health, social security and internal transport and industry, infrastructure, etc., are shared by the High Commissioner and locally elected representatives.

Health and educational facilities of a high standard are in principle available to all, but are of a higher standard in Noumea. The school system closely follows the syllabus of schools in France, and the progress of students of non-European origin tends to be slower than for children of French origin. Although all attend school, few non-Europeans gain higher qualifications.

Since the beginning of French settlement political debate among the white settlers has revolved around the rights of residents to administer their own affairs without endangering the flow of French financial aid. Between 1885 and 1956 a locally elected general council advised the governor and voted a local budget. Melanesians did not gain voting rights until 1953. They then formed a coalition with Europeans to bring the party, L'Union Calédonienne, to power on a ticket of full self-government in local affairs. Progress towards self-government was made in 1957 when a Territorial Assembly was created with powers to elect an executive to administer the territory, under the presidency of a High Commissioner. In the 1970s the Union Calédonienne became an increasingly Melanesian party as Europeans deserted it. In 1979 the Union Calédonienne, now converted to the cause of independence, formed an Independence Front in coalition with several minority Melanesian parties. The French Socialist Government of 1981 took many steps to stem the political polarisation, including the granting of complete self-government in territorial affairs in the Lemoine Statute of 1984. The statute was rejected by the Independence Front which reconstituted itself as the Kanak Socialist Liberation Front (FLNKS) and boycotted the elections held in that year. In the weeks following the election the FLNKS used roadblocks to take control of most of the territory outside Noumea. Peace was gradually restored as the Government proposed to grant the Melanesians independence in

association with France under which French citizens would retain residential and other rights. The European community, with the strong support of non-Melanesian ethnic groups vigorously rejected this proposal.

In 1985 the French Government transferred most of the self-government powers to four regional councils. In elections in September 1985, the FLNKS won a majority of seats in all regions except Noumea which was won by the settler party, the Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR). In 1986, the new Gaullist government of Jacques Chirac held a referendum. This referendum was boycotted by the FLNKS and produced a large majority for continued ties with France. It was followed by a new statute for self-government which altered the regional boundaries to limit FLNKS successes to the principal concentrations of Melanesians in the Loyalty Islands and the East Coast. The FLNKS has demonstrated its ability to direct the votes of the great mass of Melanesian voters. The future of the territory is fraught with difficulty as the lack of consensus among political circles in France is paralleled by the increasing polarisation along ethnic lines within the territory.

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In the early 1980s Ouvéa was the setting for a film called 'The Closest Island to Paradise'. In the mid-80s, the yacht used by the French commandos who blew up the *Rainbow Warrior* carried its name. In the late-80s, it was the scene of the bloodiest operation by a European army in the Pacific since World War Two. Today, the island of Ouvéa is fast developing a reputation as the cannabis capital of the Pacific. Two-metre high hedges can be found as features in carefully tended gardens around people's houses. In the village of St Joseph, a healthy specimen thrives in a sunny, well-drained plot between the street counter of the local shop and the ancient logs that surround the courtyard of the high chief Nekelo. It is so widely consumed that after every rain, stray seeds germinate where they fall - in people's lawns, driveways or gardens - and often become sturdy plants before they attract their first human eye.

In the rest of this French territory, cannabis is as illegal as in France. Possession of a single joint leads to arrest and a criminal conviction. But on Ouvéa the situation is so out of hand that the authorities merely hope to contain it by searching the bags of passengers arriving from Ouvéa at Noumea airport. 'It could be cleaned up very quickly', insists the head of the Ouvéa Gendarmerie, 'but I'd need another whole platoon of gendarmes over here, and nobody wants that.' New Caledonia's peace accord, which is eight years into its ten-year timetable, has always been at its most brittle in Ouvéa. The gendarmes and their political masters in Noumea and in Paris are left with only two possible approaches - heavy-handed or easy-going. They are choosing the latter.

### **Memories of a Massacre**

Ouvéa has the reputation, even among Kanak people, of being relaxed. There is, for example, no sign of any organised attempt to realise the cash value of the island's cannabis. It's just there - like the fish, the coconut crabs and the beautiful scenery - and nobody seems to view it, as they do in other places, as money growing on trees. But its people have much that they are proud of. Among independentists, there is pride in Ouvéa having been the first local body to elect a pro-independence mayor, Malaki Kapoa in 1977. Ouvéa is also home to the only remaining part of the Kanak Popular School movement which thrives in the northern tribe of Gossannah. Models of development are emerging from this area which are independent, sustainable and community-based. And everyone from Ouvéa knows that in 1969 the first Kanak to pass his baccalaureat (the qualification for tertiary study) was Boniface Ounou from Ouvéa.

However, the people of Ouvéa will forever be haunted by the memories of 5 May 1988. In an action widely condemned as a cynical election stunt, the then Prime Minister and Presidential hopeful, Jacques Chirac, rejected a negotiated settlement to a hostage crisis on Ouvéa and sent France's elite 11th Shock unit on an operation that left 19 Kanaks dead, at least five of whom were killed after they had surrendered. Dozens

of other innocent civilians were tortured during the two-week siege of the island during which all transport, telecommunication, radio and television links were cut.

Within weeks, the newly elected Socialist Party government of Michel Rocard had brokered a deal between the leaders of the main pro-independence grouping, the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) and the largest right-wing party, Rally for Caledonia in the Republic (RPCR). The Matignon Accords, as they became known, set out a ten year plan for economic development and 'rebalancing', culminating on a referendum on independence in 1998.

The Accords were praised around the world for bringing peace to a context that was on the brink of all-out civil war. However, they also generated considerable dissent and disillusion in the ranks of the Kanak independence movement, not least because they were signed without consultation with the movement and offered far less than its agreed minimum demands. In Ouvea, reaction was particularly hostile. Despite their suffering, nobody from Ouvea was invited to the talks. And part of the trade-off for an amnesty was that the events surrounding the massacre would not be fully investigated.

When the Accords were put to the vote in a referendum in November 1988, the French Government, the FLNKS and the RPCR all urged people to support the agreement and no political party campaigned for a boycott. However, even though the FLNKS stressed the Accords' promise of the release of Ouvea's political prisoners, Ouvea record an abstention rate of over 54 per cent of registered voters, the highest in the territory, with a further six percent voting No.<sup>1</sup> A number of the wives of prisoners did not vote and, on their eventual release, several of the prisoners expressed anger at having been used to settle an accord that they were not consulted about and did not agree with.

This unresolved tension formed the background to the tragic events of May 1989. During a ceremony to mark the first anniversary of the Ouvea massacre, just metres from the graves of the 19 victims and in front of hundreds of people from all over the territory, Djubelly Wea, a long-time leader of the independence movement in Ouvea, shot and killed Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwene Yeiwene, the President and Vice-President of the FLNKS, and was then gunned down by Tjibaou's bodyguards. Wea went down in history as a crazed and heartless killer. Ouvea was condemned.

### **Condemned and Excluded**

For the French authorities, Ouvea has still not paid a high enough price for killing four gendarmes in 1988. Asked today about any problem on the island, Gendarme Charassier explains it in all seriousness as a case of divine retribution for the deaths of his predecessors. And for some within the independence movement who have spent the last seven years naming buildings, boats and sporting events after Tjibaou and Yeiwene, Ouvea has still not paid a high enough price for producing their killer.

In the initial years after signing the Accords, French authorities subjected Ouvea to a concerted policy of isolation and deprivation of resources on the grounds that not all the weapons seized from the gendarmerie in 1988 had been retrieved. At the end of 1989, a large stock of arms was surrendered which might have improved things. However, by that time, conspiracy theories about Djubelly Wea's so-called network of accomplices had been manufactured by French intelligence agents and were being spread with uncritical enthusiasm by many people including leading figures within the FLNKS.<sup>2</sup> The ensuing witch hunts took their toll on many individuals and groups and were also generalised by some to include anyone from Ouvea. These tensions were also played out within Ouvea where the Caledonian Union (UC), a member party of the FLNKS which favours the Accords, monopolised control over the allocation of French government money when it eventually became available, and of paid employment in the bureaucracy.

For many on Ouvea, the Accords have brought nothing at all. For those who were active in the independence movement, there is a high level of anger at seeing a handful of people, including a number

who were uninvolved in the movement, sitting in the provincial offices receiving salaries or driving cars owned by the provinces or getting financial handouts - all from the blood of the 19 people killed in the cave. Ouvea is not the only part of the territory where Kanak people feel shut out of the deal between the French Socialist Government, the settler business community and what many consider an unaccountable Kanak political elite. However, the sense of bitterness and betrayal is probably at its most acute there and has given rise to some developments that might otherwise appear quite bizarre.

In the 1995 provincial elections, for example, Josia Ihmeling, one of the independence activists who had been taken prisoner after the attack on the cave, stood on the list of the anti-independence RPCR party. He was not elected and now, by some reports, has abandoned politics and joined a fundamentalist religious sect. Equally telling was the formation of a political group called 'Ouvea, the Excluded Ones'. It is led by prominent independence activists including a survivor of the 1988 massacre, Hilaire Dianou, whose brother, Alphonse, led the operation in THIC cave and was the one most conclusively proven to have been executed by the military after his arrest. The decision by 'Ouvea, the Excluded Ones' to organise a campaign last year to support the presidential campaign of Jacques Chirac was widely recognised not as a serious attempt at influence but as a gesture of contempt for the way the island has been treated by the signatories to the Matignon Accords.

### Development Potential

Ouvea is a 40 kilometre long atoll, the northern-most of the Loyalty Islands which lie east of mainland New Caledonia. It had been targeted by sandalwood hunters and Pacific 'blackbirders', whose activities were cited by France as grounds for annexation in 1865, twelve years after it claimed sovereignty over the mainland. Ouvea's Kanak population is made up of two language groups: Iaai, the original Melanesian inhabitants; and Faga Ouvea, descendants of pre-colonial migrants from Wallis Island (the indigenous name for which is Ouvea) and other parts of Polynesia. The latest census records a population of 3,540, less than 2% of whom are non-Kanak. A high birth-rate combined with migration to the island from other parts of New Caledonia saw Ouvea's population increase by 28% since the census six years earlier.

Not that there's any industry to attract people to or even retain them. There is copra, and there have been improvements in this sector with almost all product being processed locally in the new oil plant. However, it is still very hard work for returns that are low (less than 100 francs or US\$1 per hour) and sporadic.

There is no commercial fishing, although the island has the best fishery in the territory. It is free of *la gratte* ('the scratch'), an unpleasant sickness that comes from eating fish from many other parts of New Caledonia. And it sports a lagoon which, from French Government surveys, could sustain annual harvests of many thousands of tonnes. It is also home to abundant land crabs, including the coconut crab (an endangered species in many parts of the Pacific) which can weigh four kilos and eats only coconuts which it breaks with its huge claw.

Then there is tourism. International guide books have long placed Ouvea at the top of their 'must-sees' in New Caledonia. Club Med has been trying for years to negotiate a site and market the tourist attractions: the spectacular cliffs of Lekine; deep blue water holes in Hanawa; the Mouli bridge which serves as a viewing platform for a natural aquarium of all kinds of sea life; the *bagyine*, a beautiful and unusual parrot found only in Ouvea; the stunning limestone caves of Houloup whose depths have never been fully explored; and the pristine white-sand beach that runs the length of the island.

However, the locals have made their feelings clear about foreign-owned tourism. In the late 1970s, the *Relais de Fayaoué* which was the only large-scale tourist resort on the island was burnt to the ground by locals who were upset that virtually no benefits were going to the islanders. When the complex was rebuilt bigger and better in 1983, it was again destroyed within a couple of months of its grand opening. Today, the *Relais de Fayaoué* is home only to a few goats, its ruins standing as a monument to Ouvea's resistance

to outside control.

The island's current tourist industry consists of a few small-scale family enterprises. The islanders have a very relaxed attitude to their holidaying visitors. As one French tourist remarked: 'They don't mind if you come here, but they don't mind if you don't either.' They do mind hearing so many tourists say that they were advised before leaving France to avoid Ouvea. Locals are quick to point out that, although there are occasional skirmishes with the gendarmes, they have no history of attacking tourists. In fact, tourists often comment on how easily they are befriended and brought along to local events. Even young conscripts finishing their military service are well-received, although the army does try to deter them from visiting the island by providing a free return ticket to Lifou or Mare but not Ouvea. As in so many other places, tourism in Ouvea comes at a price, for example, the effects of package tours of large groups of Japanese. Their day excursions three or four times each week benefit only two local operators but clog the planes for everyone. Locals wanting to travel to or from Noumea are now regularly finding that 43 out of 46 seats on the plane have been block booked months in advance for Japanese tourists.

The net result of this sort of 'development' is that, although there has been an increase in the amount of money coming into Ouvea, it is distributed very unequally and, in the perception of many, unfairly. The competition for paid employment and the lack of transparency in allocating these positions generates tensions such as the recent occupation of the airport at Houloup by the people from that tribe who insisted that their employment needs should be recognised.

The growth of inequalities damages the fabric of society in Ouvea. Burglaries which had been rare are now becoming commonplace. Services which used to be offered freely in the knowledge that they would be reciprocated at some stage by someone else, such as a ride to the post office or the loan of a mower, now command a price. As long as a large sector of society remains in severe poverty, show-piece developments like the new desalination plant will not address the real needs of the people. A common refrain about the plant is that it is 'good for the people who can afford to buy the water from it'. These effects of 'development' are every bit as damaging as the hand-out mentality about which so many Kanak people have expressed fears.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Impact of the Matignon Accords**

As has been pointed out by a leading FLNKS figure, Raphael Mapou, the overall effect of the type of development promoted under the Matignon Accords is that, rather than preparing the territory's economy for independence, it is locking it into a position of dependence. This, he argues, will leave the country with shrinking options for economic development.

However, in the name of economic realism, Kanak people are still being exhorted to follow this path. The UC has opted for development based on a market economy, as its president, Francois Burck, told the party's 1991 congress:

*We are confronted by a market economy. When we say independence we place our country in a zone where there are rules. If we say no to the market economy, with what do we replace it? And if we say yes to the market economy, this assumes constraints.<sup>4</sup>*

Already, the 'constraints' of this model of development are seen to promote a wide range of policies, some of which have serious political implications. Immigration, for example, which was promoted by France in the 1970s as an expressly political strategy, is now being promoted as a necessity for the fulfilment of the development aims of the Matignon Accords. Calling for more immigration from Europe of 'people who work well to teach people who don't know how to work', the RPCR president, Jacques Lafleur, declared: 'New Caledonia needs to increase its population to achieve economic growth... This is a universal economic principle, not a trap to anyone.'<sup>5</sup>

Influential people in the UC, including Leopold Joredie and Burck, have long indicated their readiness to abandon completely the agreed goal of Kanak socialist independence and any alternative development models which might be pursued within it. Burck knew that this would be opposed, not only within the FLNKS but also by his own party:

*If we (UC) announce tomorrow that we no longer support Kanak socialist independence there will be war, because no-one will agree. Our work is to bring people to be realistic, we have to be honest with them. For us it is not a question of Kanak independence, but of what sort of independence and is it possible.*<sup>6</sup>

As part of this process, Burck even began talking about the dangers of the 1998 referendum refocusing attention back on the choice: independence, yes or no? Rather, he argued, it should enable a continuation of the process that was begun by the Accords and serve as a 'ratification of this consensus'.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein he declared that his understanding of independence had 'evolved and is no longer taken as meaning a break with France but rather a partnership'<sup>8</sup>

However, in April 1996, FLNKS negotiators were stunned to be told by the RPR Prime Minister, Alain Juppe, that full independence would not be an option in the 1998 referendum and that the best they could hope for would be internal autonomy, a position rejected by most Kanak people twenty years earlier. This led to an FLNKS walk-out of the talks in Paris. The FLNKS now favours the option of becoming an 'associated state' but, as its president, Rock Wamytan, made clear after the break-down of the talks, this status presupposes a prior step of New Caledonia becoming an independent state.<sup>9</sup> In response to these developments, a faction within the UC (led by Bernard Lepeu, Damien Yeiwene and Charlie Pidjot) succeeded in having the party remove Joredie, Wamytan and Burck from its negotiating team, declaring that 'the chapter for a consensus solution has come to an end'.<sup>10</sup>

### Who is Winning the Bet?

From the outset, Rocard was candid about the aim of the Accords. He considered that they provided the framework for what he described as 'a veritable economic and cultural decolonisation without any change in (French) sovereignty'.. Rocard believed that at the end of ten years, Kanak people who had wanted independence would have come to an appreciation of the benefits of remaining a French territory. 'My dearest hope' he declared 'is that in 1998 the people of New Caledonia will choose to remain a part of France'.<sup>11</sup>

For his part, Tjibaou believed that with an unfavourable *rapport de force* he had to make a deal and he got what he believed was the best one possible in the circumstances. He also believed that New Caledonian society was not ready for independence and needed time and the right conditions to construct it. He spoke of the Matignon Accords as a bet and was confident that, by 1998, the independence movement could win the referendum having convinced significant numbers of their opponents of the advantages of independence.<sup>12</sup>

The president of the Loyalty Islands Province and founder of the modern independence movement, Nidoish Naisseline, makes a similar point now, even though his party, Kanak Socialist Liberation (LKS) has formally withdrawn from the Matignon Accords. 'If the RPCR is not for independence, maybe it's our fault because we have not proven that independence is a gain. At the moment, we in the LKS say that the idea of independence is completely tarnished'.<sup>13</sup> However, as one activist commented at the 1992 FLNKS congress, 'We need to be careful that we do not make such a concerted effort to attract opponents of independence that we lose our own supporters.'

This sentiment is reflected in the more 'mobilising' tone coming to the fore from elements within the FLNKS and its constituent parties.<sup>14</sup> However, people aspiring to provide the independence movement with

a more invigorated and militant leadership need to be aware that, if the degree of disillusion evident on Ouvéa is any indication, it will take more than rhetoric to remobilise the independence movement.

On Ouvéa, many people who had been very active in the independence movement now pay much less attention to what they perceive as the latest *magouille* (underhand political deal) in Paris or Nouméa than to the football prospects of Christian Karembeu.<sup>15</sup> They remain committed to the idea of independence, but given their experience of the Matignon Accords, they fear what it might actually look like. People from Ouvéa, who ten years ago were prepared to die for independence, are now far from sure that they will even cast a vote for it.

1. D. Small, 'New Caledonia: Will the Rocard Plan Last the Distance?' *New Zealand International Review*, May/June 1989.
2. For a detailed account, see S. Ounei-Small, 'Kanak: The Peace Signed With Our Blood', in D. Robie (ed.), *Tu Galala. Social Change in the Pacific*, Wellington, 1992.
3. See interviews in Isabelle Leblic, *Les Kanak Face au Développement*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1993, 389-97.
4. *Les Nouvelles Caledoniens*, 12 November 1991.
5. PACNEWS, 16 January 1991.
6. *Pacific Report*, Volume 6 Number 14].
7. *Les Nouvelles Caledoniens*, 25 March 1991.
8. PACNEWS, 29 May 1991.
9. *Les Nouvelle Hebdo*, 17-22 May 1996.
10. Reuter, 20 May 1996.
11. Reuter, 28 and 29 August 1988.
12. see J-M. Tjibaou, *La Presence Kanak*, Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1996, chapter 30.
13. *La Voix du Peuple*, September 1996.
14. *Les Nouvelle Caledoniens*, 9 November 1996.
15. A Kanak from Canala, Karembeu is a full French international currently fought over by Real Madrid and FC Barcelona.

## Reflections on Political Murder:

New Caledonia 1984<sup>1</sup>

Bronwen Douglas, ANU

At about 8.30p.m. on 5 December 1984 Lucien Kouhia nearly died. He was lucky. Bleeding profusely from numerous buckshot wounds, he staggered more than ten kilometres to sound the alarm about an ambush which killed ten of his fellow tribespeople. Sixteen men in two light trucks had been returning to their village of Tiendanite, in the upper Hienghène valley of north-eastern New Caledonia, from a local meeting of the FLNKS (Front de Libération nationale kanak et socialiste - Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front). There they had been informed by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, also from Tiendanite, leader of the FLNKS, President of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Kanaky and mayor of Hienghène, that the FLNKS had decided to moderate its recent anticolonial, pro-independence campaign of armed blockade and occupation. The campaign had followed a Kanak boycott of Territorial Assembly elections on 18 November, but now the FLNKS was to enter negotiations with the French Socialist Government on a strategy and timetable for independence. In return, seventeen FLNKS militants were to be released from custody.

As the trucks rolled around a curve on the dirt road which winds beside the Hienghène river, they were brought to a sudden, shocking halt. A large coconut palm had been felled across the road below the house of Maurice Mitride, a part-French settler whose family had lived in the district for a century or more. At this point the road is overlooked by a fairly steep hill and is separated from the river by an open, gently sloping grassy bank about fifty metres wide. There is virtually no cover; from the vantage point of the hill it makes a perfect site for an ambush. As the leading vehicle skidded to a stop it exploded, apparently dynamited, and the other truck cannoned into it. In the glare of spotlights and leaping flames from the burning truck, a murderous fusillade began, fired by expert hunters using high-powered shotguns and rifles. Several men died instantly. Apparently determined to leave no witnesses, the attackers moved down to the killing ground to finish off the wounded. Lucien's uncle, Pascal Kouhia, with a bullet-hole the size of a fist in his right thigh, and Joseph Pei, struck in the foot, managed to roll into the river beneath a clump of bamboo. They remained submerged, their noses above the surface while spotlights swept the river and their attackers fired at anything moving in the water. Eventually Pascal and Joseph swam across the river and crawled more than a kilometre to the nearest village. Lucien, badly wounded, sneaked away and set out for Hienghène village, while two others, more or less unhurt, hid until it was safe to escape on foot to Tiendanite. The dead and the dying, left for dead, remained.

Alerted by Lucien, the French military doctor based at Hienghène made one ambulance trip to the scene of the ambush during the night and returned with two wounded and the wife of Mitride's settler neighbour, Henri Garnier, who claimed that her house had been burned in an FLNKS attack. In passing, however, the doctor noted that the Garnier house was intact. He dared not make another trip. The few men remaining at Tiendanite were also unable to reach their comrades because of the gunmen, but they kept an eye on the latter's movements. Gendarmes at Hienghène refused to leave the village until the arrival next morning of heavily armed reinforcements. It was nearly midday on 6 December before medical attention reached the remaining victims. It was too late. During that lonely night some men died from blood loss and shock; one was still alive and able to testify, but died shortly afterwards. During much of 6 December military helicopters performed a shuttle service, initially evacuating frightened settlers from Hienghène, and eventually carrying dead and wounded to morgue and hospital in Nouméa. Two of the dead, including the chief of the Tiendanite tribe,<sup>2</sup> were brothers of Jean-Marie Tjibaou. Tjibaou, however, refused to countenance violent reprisals by the FLNKS and announced that



he would not allow his personal loss to divert him from his commitment to defuse the crisis which had paralysed the territory since 18 November.

Survivors claimed that between 15 and 18 people participated in the ambush, all local settlers. Several left soon afterwards for Nouméa, but seven men, including Mitride and several members of the Lapetite family, took to the bush. Portions of both the Mitride and Lapetite properties were subject to land claims by Tiendanite clans. After several days at large, these men surrendered and were charged. Before leaving the vicinity of the ambush they set fire to Garnier's house, to encourage the fiction that they had merely defended their properties against an FLNKS attack. While passing up the Hienghène valley they also fired Jean-Marie Tjibaou's house. The Nouméa media, notable for their pro-settler bias, would have liked to believe the self-defence story, but on-site evidence of the brutally systematic, the accounts of survivors and the doctor's report about the untouched state of the Garnier house made it obvious, even to the most prejudiced commentators, that 'there had been an ambush ... libations in common had preceded the fusillade'.<sup>3</sup>

In Nouméa, however, bastion of colonial occupation and opposition to Kanak independence, Mitride and the Lapetites assumed the status of victims or even heroes, and a committee was formed to fund their defence and support.<sup>4</sup> Little mention was made of the plight of Kanak victims or of a tribe which had lost half its adult men; there was reference rather to the terrible provocation which settlers had endured from the FLNKS, justifying their fears. It was argued that such fears had produced an extreme, but understandable response, given the intolerable laxity of French authorities in refusing to crush the FLNKS campaign and restore law and order.<sup>5</sup>

In a press conference the Public Prosecutor stressed the careful preparation and ruthless execution of the ambush. He attributed it, however, to '*métis* [people of mixed descent] and even one Melanesian'.<sup>6</sup> At a stroke, he dismissed the aspect of racial conflict by implying that the whole thing was almost intra-ethnic, between Melanesians; real white men would not act like that, whatever the provocation. The line was eagerly adopted by the local newspaper: 'it was a confrontation not of "white settlers" and Melanesians, but of *métis* (some of whom have Hienghène blood) and activists of the FLNKS'.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation ignored the cultural and political self-identification of such people as European (many settler families in the bush are of mixed descent, not necessarily Melanesian - Mitride is part-Réunionese) and their legal status: they were subject to French common law only, and not to the separate colonial legal system of Melanesian custom; they also held individual land rights under the aegis of the colonial state, rather than communal rights on the basis of custom.

How might the episode be interpreted? It speaks to wider issues and contexts in which it was embedded, while they, reciprocally, cast light upon it. The episode exemplified the wildly divergent ways in which Kanaks and settlers, whatever their ethnic origins, construct and experience reality. Key elements in this spasm of settler violence were long-term apprehension about the relentless and effective demands by Kanaks for restitution of clan lands; hatred of the FLNKS and shock and confusion at its capacity to destabilise and control rural areas; a sense of desertion and betrayal by French authorities in Nouméa and Paris. More generally, the episode contrasted the selective, controlled, intensely psychological - and all too convincing - violence of the FLNKS strategy with the readiness of at least some settlers to employ large and powerful arsenals with extreme brutality. Contrast the awesome self-control of Tjibaou and the FLNKS after the Hienghène atrocity with the mindless rampage of destruction which paralysed Nouméa on 11-12 January 1985, following the shooting of a settler youth by agents unknown.<sup>8</sup>

Both sides, inevitably, were convinced of their moral and historical legitimacy, but the settler leaders were far more intransigent and unresponsive than the Kanak. The settler world-view was reinforced by the relentless bias of the Nouméa-based media and right-wing politicians both Territorial (including some Melanesians) and metropolitan. All insisted on the fiction that the FLNKS was a small, unrepresentative extremist minority, which manipulated the cowed, passive, pro-French Melanesian majority through force and intimidation and was itself subject to sinister outside influences.<sup>9</sup> Even if

it were taken for granted that local newspaper and broadcast reports were always radically distorted, as did FLNKS supporters, it was impossible to construct more plausible versions of events without access to participants and eyewitnesses. I did have such access in the Tiendanite affair, but people normally had to choose either to believe or disbelieve the media as a matter of principle. With such a narrow and distorted information base, rumour and wild exaggeration inevitably flourished. This applied especially to Europeans, most of whom lived insulated in the artificially French context of Nouméa and who, as the dominant ethnic group, had rarely needed to develop sensitivity to or understanding of Melanesian culture, motivations and aspirations. The latter were far less dependent for information on the printed and broadcast word and perforce had a fairly shrewd grasp of what made their oppressors tick; they, too, however, had their stereotypes of the other, sharpened by envy and resentment inspired in historical experience as have-nots, marginalised in their own land.

The increasingly ambiguous position of French security forces was illustrated by the January 1985 killing by gendarme sharpshooters of the FLNKS leader, Eloi Machoro, and his deputy; by an assault by *gardes mobiles* on FLNKS villagers at Thio in an episode involving blatant provocation by extreme right-wing elements from Nouméa; by an escalating campaign of expropriation of FLNKS arms and arrest of Kanak activists, while settler arsenals were left untouched. This ambivalence was foreshadowed in the Hienghène affair: the tardiness of official efforts to succour the wounded contrasted sharply with their haste to evacuate nervous settlers and with the overwhelming military presence, protecting settler properties as well as mourners, during the funeral of the Tiendanite victims.

From one perspective, the men ambushed were rank and file FLNKS members belonging to a small, insignificant, poverty-stricken tribe. In another sense, they had considerable political and symbolic significance: they were relatives and friends of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, whose tribe Tiendanite was. His stoicism enhanced his prestige and credibility and altered attitudes to the FLNKS, in Paris if not Nouméa. Colonisation of the Hienghène valley was marked by violence and racial tension. Hienghène became a keystone of the Kanak drive to re-create a sense of cultural integrity, to reclaim lost clan lands and to gain political independence. The customary high chief of the interior district of which Tiendanite is part was one of the most respected customary supporters of the independence movement; he was married to a sister of one of the ambush victims.

In the past, the single-minded determination of colonial administrations and settlers to crush Melanesian opposition eventually carried the day. But in every previous colonial war, a key element in French victory was indigenous political fragmentation and the readiness of some clans to fight as allies of the French for parochial reasons and against local enemies. In the indigenous world, there was no virtue in continuing a struggle when human and material costs seemed likely to be too high. Shifting alliances, negotiation, compromise, compensation and peace-making were as integral to fighting as armed clashes. By the mid 1980s, though not all Melanesians concurred with the strategy and methods of the FLNKS, local political fragmentation was far less marked. Furthermore, the indigenous logic which made surrender the only sensible policy in face of the implacable European repression was less convincing. Many young people, dispossessed, unemployed, lacking skills or training, or unable to penetrate colonial structures of domination and socio-economic control, were no longer satisfied or constrained by the compensations and discipline of customary values and social contexts. The tragedy was that things had come to a point where both local sides in this classic French colonial confrontation felt they had their backs to the wall. Between them, in uneasy, ambiguous neutrality, was the French Socialist Government and the potentially overwhelming power of the security forces. Writing in 1985, I expressed concern that, should the FLNKS program of psychological pressure and selective activism prove insufficient, as seemed likely, or should anything happen to Tjibaou, who combined political astuteness with profound commitment to a customary ideology, there was no reason to believe that Kanaks would be unwilling to engage in a sustained campaign to achieve their ends by whatever means and whatever the costs.

## Postscript 1997

The French judicial system eventually served the seven admitted killers well: after nearly three years of tortuous procedures, during which they almost escaped prosecution altogether, a mostly white, entirely non-indigenous jury acquitted them of premeditated ambush, on the grounds of legitimate self-defence. The decision outraged Kanaks, and the victims' families appealed to the European Court of Human Rights for a retrial. Six months later, with the Territory embroiled in virtual civil war - as recalled in David Small's paper - a more summary justice overtook one of the seven, who was shot and killed, apparently by Kanaks.<sup>10</sup> Small's paper testifies chillingly that if the forebodings of my conclusion were not fulfilled to the letter, neither were they misplaced. What has happened in New Caledonia in the 1990s attests to the inadequacy of binary models of colonised reactions which cast violence and non-violence as polar opposites and privilege the former as more courageous and romantic. Violence and non-violence are more aptly identified as reiterated, intertwined motifs in Kanak agency and experience in colonial contexts: they are two sides of a strategic coin which may have other possible faces.

1. This is a slightly amended version of an article published in *Arena* (70 [1985]:21-6). My narrative is based on conversations during and after the victims' funeral with Vianney Tjibaou, who escaped the massacre, and other men of the tribe of Tiendanite, plus lengthy discussions with survivors in Nouméa. See also *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 7 December 1984; an account by Helen Fraser and Damien Murphy in the *Melbourne Age*, 10 December 1984, based on an interview with Vianney Tjibaou; Lionel Duroy, *Hienghène, le désespoir calédonien*, Paris 1988. For recent political background and the aims and strategies of the FLNKS see Miriam Dornoy, *Politics in New Caledonia*, Sydney, 1984; Helen Fraser, *Your Flag's Blocking Our Sun*, ABC, Sydney, 1990; Jean-Marie Tjibaou, *La présence kanak*, (ed. Alban Bensa and Eric Wittersheim, Paris, 1996).
2. 'Tribe' is used in its technical New Caledonian sense, to mean a unit in a colonial administrative hierarchy: a 'tribe', *tribu*, occupies a 'reserve' within a 'district'.
3. Public Prosecutor, press conference, *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 11 December 1984
4. *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 15, 21 December 1984.
5. E.g., interview with M. Mitride, *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 11 December 1984; press conference of Maître Chatenay, lawyer for the defendants, *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 22 December 1984
6. *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 11 December 1984.
7. *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 10, 22 December 1984.
8. *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 12-13, 14 January 1985.
9. *Nouvelles calédoniennes*, 24 November, 9 December 1984, 12-13 January 1985; interview with M. David, *Herald* (Melbourne), 30 January 1985
10. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1988, 13.

## **Decolonisation: the Highest Form of Imperialism**

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Three years ago I described striking contradictions between the United States and Micronesian positions regarding Micronesian independence: Micronesians were justified in proclaiming their independence, but the US had no equivalent right to speak of acknowledging Micronesians' independence, given its unwillingness to revise the Compacts of Free Association that impart to relations with Micronesians a status less than treaty arrangements between sovereign nation-states.<sup>1</sup> I now propose an altered contention: in the 'logic' of imperial geopolitical expansionism, decolonisation tends to be no more than a stage in the processes of influence, acquisition, transformation, and withdrawal that constitute the imperial paradigm. Questions about the substance and character of Micronesian independence, then, are too narrow. The larger issue is whether decolonisation implies a real diminution of the imperial web or merely further movement along trajectories of domestic ambivalence about the imperial idea itself and a range of attempts at reducing the costs of managing an empire.

America's post-war presence in Micronesia should be viewed as an outcome of several historical and geopolitical trajectories, one of which, the Cold War, looms so large that it obscures the others. Since the Cold War, the American capacity to examine coherently the situation of island groups in Micronesia, has attenuated to a new low. I hope to set the Cold War aside and examine the US position in Micronesia in light of longer-term patterns: the history of colonial and imperial expansion in general, the history of American expansion in particular, and Micronesians' own readings of world history.

Colonialism and imperialism are outcomes of competing social, cultural, economic, and political factors that promote not only expansion and dominion but efficiency and compassion, and decolonisation is thus an expectable - if not invariable - outcome, a sign not of an empire's retreat but of vitality. I attempt to inject material into a conversation from which it has been sadly lacking.

### **Imperialism as a very old phenomenon**

Political scientists, historians (and fellow-travelling social scientists) have debated the origins and causes of imperialism as if it were a unique and definable process with its sources in the fifteenth century and its zenith in the late Victorian age. Nothing could be further from the truth. Territorial expansion has been a fundamental aspect of human behaviour since the Paleolithic. Colonies, incorporation of indigenous populations, and extension of integrative administrative practices played a key role in the development of many early states, and operated even where there were no centralized states. We find records of these sorts of expansionism in many parts of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Mediterranean, Meso-America, and South America.

The notion that the 'world system' is an essentially modern entity is a part of this outlook. As Abu-Lughod, Blaut, and Frank and Gills, among others, have demonstrated,<sup>2</sup> the rise of the West appears as an historical rupture - a development without precedent - only in the West. In most cases of expansion a variety of interactions, influences, and domination have mingled. If we trace intellectual traditions so important to Western humanist and political thought, we recall that classical Greece flourished as an expanding, colonial civilisation. These practices were, of course, hardly limited to Europeans. The Arab domain was, for example, founded by means of 'desert power' in the way that modern empires were forged via sea power. These same Arab regimes were in time replaced by Mongols and Turks and Crusaders before the Portuguese and French and British empires appeared. The British Isles themselves were colonised by Celts, as well as Romans, Germans, Scandinavians, and Norman French. English occupation of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland

presaged imperial expansion into what may be called the British far abroad. Indeed, much of Enlightenment interest in classical Hellenism stemmed from a desire to learn from Greek imperial precedents. In the later eighteenth century this topic 'received special attention owing to the conflict between Britain and her American colonies. Many pamphlets were written both in French and English with the aim of finding justification in the practices of the ancients'.<sup>3</sup>

### The disintegration of empires

Rather than marshal historical examples, I employ a model of imperial disintegration developed in D.W. Meinig's classic *The Shaping of America*.<sup>4</sup> His model is especially relevant here because he generates it via the disintegration of the British Empire in the 13 North American colonies, which reproduced the process in the course of their westward expansion.

An imperial state, in Meinig's formulation, comprises a capital, a core, and a 'domain'. There are three basic sorts of imperial territories outside the domestic realm: areas of conquered people under direct rule; areas colonised by settlers from the conquering state; and marginal areas under various forms of indirect rule ('protectorates'). In these territories there are capitals and hinterlands, mirroring in some degree relations between the capital and core at home, and often marginal areas under some degree of influence. What Meinig calls a 'trunk line' links the metropolitan and colonial capitals, transporting the influences and agents that establish and maintain relations of dominance and subordination. In order to promote efficient administration, the metropole seeks a degree of uniformity, or at least conformity, in institutions, values, language etc., as the standards of the empire. At the same time conquered peoples struggle to preserve their cultural integrity and political autonomy as best they can. There are significant differences in the degrees to which individuals and communities seek or resist change, and the imperial power encourages those more inclined to pursue change to serve as its agents; increasingly strong links between the metropole and colony are forged by colonial subjects engaged in acculturation. Tension between assimilationists and autonomists is likely to increase as their interests diverge. Because empires rely upon force as their ultimate sanction, and therefore need to appear strong, force is applied to confront and control these rising tensions. These sanctions in turn threaten those committed to challenging the metropolitan power, and they in turn promote identity politics and solidarity movements in order to unify and mobilise the provincial population in effective resistance.

Meinig points to three main sources of imperial collapse: revolts at the periphery; internal collapse of a weakened centre; and dismemberment following defeat by a rival empire. As consequences of the cycles of resistance, empires tend to come apart at the seams: subordinate peoples have forged many positive ties to their territorial capitals, as the points of linkage with the imperial centre, and many sorts of local identities as modes of resistance; together these foreshadowings of integration lead to formation of successor states. In any mature empire, Meinig emphasizes, revolt is most likely to be initiated by those who are most acquainted with the imperial system, those who have acculturated to some degree, who recognise the possibilities for transformation, and who can mobilise local populations. Resistance to imperialism thus begets nationalism; leaders who have been schooled in the promotion and administration of empire turn these skills to its dismemberment. For these reasons, revolts are likely to begin in provincial capitals and spread to hinterlands: the most critical points in imperial systems are, then, the provincial termini of the imperial trunk lines. The longer the trunk line the more difficult it is for the centre to enforce its rule, and revolts are prone to increase in frequency or intensity. In time the provincial culture comes to be seen as the standard and imperial influences as corrupting. Out of this sequence there forms a new axis and an emerging successor state which, given the opportunity, is in position to begin anew the formation of centre, core and domain and the processes of expansion.

Three immediate lessons can be gleaned from this model. One is the sense of repetitive motion that imperial relations impart. Empires do not randomly evolve and disappear, but the processes that promote the rendering of one give impetus to the expansion of another. Decolonisation has the

potential, then, to beget colonialism; it is a stage in an imperial sequence, not a culmination. Second, there are likely to be highly competent and effective forces in the colonies themselves promoting continued integration with the metropole; they frequently seek to preserve the empire. Third is an appreciation of the mixed motives and interests out of which is spawned a pattern that becomes clear only in hindsight. The interests and actions of governments, commercial sectors, and missionary organisations, to name only those salient in the present context, lead to both cooperation and opposition, assimilation and nativism, and many other clashes of countervailing tendencies. Empires can be both self-perpetuating and self-destructive simultaneously. This paradox underlies the history of American expansionism.

### **Historicising American colonialism**

Bernard Bailyn demonstrated in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*<sup>5</sup> that much of what North America's rebel colonists claimed to be doing was reasserting their rights to govern themselves as freeborn Englishmen - they explicitly construed their movement as conservative, and drew upon tradition to support their cause. It is easy to grasp Meinig's sense of the ways in which provincial knowledge of the colonial centre's mores can be used to assert not merely equality with the metropole, but moral superiority on the metropole's own terms. The severing of direct administrative ties is pursued and rationalised on the grounds that the colonial population can do traditional things at least as well as the home population.

The French and Indian War (1756-63) was, among other things, about who would control expansion west from the thirteen American colonies. Draper argues that the American Revolution came about as a consequence of the British victory in that prior struggle: with the French presence no longer an issue, the British sought to close off the west, attempting to halt expansion and preclude further conflicts with Native Americans.<sup>6</sup> The intense interest of the colonists in expansion drove much of the new republic's policy. Sales and exploitation of western lands were expected to finance much of the new country's debt servicing. Under the Articles of Confederation (which united the former colonies between the outbreak of the Revolution and ratification of the Constitution), a series of land ordinances regulating the Ohio River Valley and adjacent areas were promulgated, culminating in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. These measures were put into effect before the United States came into existence; yet they established fundamental policies - colonial practices - that would guide all future American expansion. American colonial policy, then, is a product of the Americans' own colonial history as much as a consequence of the situations that evolved during the nineteenth-century expansionist.

### **The Northwest Ordinance and the new colonies**

As Peter Onuf explains, the U.S. Congress was merely following British precedent 'when it construed itself as the sovereign and then set about establishing and chartering "colonies" in the western lands. These new entities would have to recapitulate their predecessors' colonial history in order to become their equals in the new union.'<sup>7</sup> As they looked west, however, the Americans confronted the same problems that had prompted the British to resist further expansion. Ambivalence marked the American outlook. Many feared that continued movement into the west would destroy the union; George Washington thought it would promote disunion, a premonition that characterised much later opposition to expansion. The new government wanted to raise revenues and avoid costs, but soon recognized that industrious settlers would enter the area only if it was effectively governed. As they convinced themselves that they had to impose congressional controls in the Northwest Territory, leaders in Congress sought to ensure that these lands would not be under its perpetual authority, even as they worked to guarantee congressional control over the population requirements that would eventually permit transition to statehood. Their solution was explicitly 'colonial': the United States would establish colonies administered by the national government but which would in time become self-governing, equal partners in the union. The notion of 'territories' that were distinctly not 'states' had been evolved. Territories were proffered

the right to eventual statehood, but this status was deemed irrelevant for initial settlement; local autonomy and democracy were seen as threats to the good order that was necessary to entice settlers.

No sooner was settlement underway, however, than the pioneers began levelling charges of colonialism against the national government, consciously employing the rhetoric of the Revolution. In demanding an end to the 'colonial yoke', various settlers claimed that their status was one of bondage, vassalage, and even slavery. They likened the rule of the American federal government to a 'British & princely' imposition, 'better suited', as one of them wrote in 1801, 'for an English or Spanish colony than for citizens of the United States.'

In defense of his policies, the governor of this Northwest 'colony' called attention to its 'infant situation'. Because of their political incompetency, the residents of the Northwest Territory were, he said, 'subjects', not 'true American citizens', likening the Northwest Ordinance to the old royal charters issued to the original colonies. In time, attainment of statehood would redeem their 'temporary colonial condition'. Meantime, however, they must pass through stages of development, evolving gradually toward political maturity.

Onuf emphasises 'the often contradictory character of the principles on which the American territorial system was founded'. The conflict lay between the rights the new states claimed and the authority of Congress - the constitutional limits of national authority were, he suggests, 'unresolvable', grounded as they were in 'conflicting interests and contradictory principles'. Indeed, use of the term 'colony' exemplified the 'chronic ambivalence' of the territories toward the national government. These relations were full of 'ambiguities and contradictions....rooted in the fundamental dilemma of territorial constitutionalism: how could the territories, as political communities, claim "rights" if Congress was sovereign and its authority unlimited?'. This 'conceptual muddle' laid down the template for the rest of American colonial history. The fundamental contradictions, strange as it may seem,

*provided eloquent testimony to the nearly universal support for the constitutional ideal that had guided the American territorial system since its founding. Territories would not be held in perpetual dependency but could look forward to statehood and membership in the union.*<sup>8</sup>

The Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 ultimately proved 'a blueprint for future communities'.

This American ideal, embedded in a struggle to decide whether power would be located with a sovereign people in the territories or with a sovereign congress, was never resolved. American citizens in the territories were capable of acquiring sovereignty from congress only after they acknowledged congress's authority to bestow statehood. As long as these colonies were populated by American citizens upon whom congress could count to participate in the national political community in predictable, partisan ways, congress was willing to make this transfer of authority. But when the US expanded into Mexico and the far west, and then into the Caribbean and Pacific, problems arose: how could brown-skinned, Spanish or Austronesian speaking peoples ever be expected to mature out of political infancy through the stages of development into maturity? This dilemma, not the question of territorial authority itself, would shape American colonial expansion, and explain the course of American decolonisation.

The Northwest Ordinance applied historical lessons to a developing problem on the frontier, and established a pattern for all American expansion. It provided Americans with a new way to conceptualise expansion: first would come settlement and then development, and only afterwards would an autonomous political status be achieved.

## Manifest Destiny: from the old Northwest to the new Far West

Americans have almost always hailed themselves as anti-colonialists, citing their own struggles for independence as their charter. But in puzzling out the problem of how to move westward into lands still occupied by Native Americans and therefore deemed threatening, the US simply stood on precedent: it recapitulated its own colonial experience, explicitly creating colonies that would have to live up to mandated expectations in order to receive the same rights of self-government as the original thirteen. Later, when the US occupied areas where there resided people who had their own historical, cultural, and political precedents, this strategy would prove to have unforeseen implications. Moreover, the US would turn a blind eye to its colonial heritage, enabling itself to deny that any of its territorial acquisitions were colonies. Because the US had, by its own account, no colonies, it did not need to - indeed, could not - decolonise. The roots of American decolonisation lie in its own experiences as colonies and its recycling of that inheritance to extend across the continent.

Critical to westward movement was Indian removal. Early American theories of expansion depended upon vast tracts available to settlers whose investment in improvements would ensure relative equality among all Americans. This was Thomas Jefferson's notion of an 'empire of liberty': class distinctions and tensions that afflicted Old World societies could be avoided in the New World as long as there was free land to support yeoman farmers. But most proponents of expansion, having seen the destruction of Native American populations along the eastern seaboard, could foresee no place in these schemes for the native inhabitants of the west. Anglo-American prosperity would not be nearly as inclusive as it conceived itself to be, and the concept of 'Manifest Destiny' was, among other things, a means of rationalising this disastrous policy. 'Destinarian' thought drew upon a wide range of beliefs to trumpet a moral basis for ethnic cleansing. It became increasingly important to the westward course of empire as it approached independent Mexico. Indians, it seemed, could be removed, but what about Mexican peasants?

Intense argument accompanied the war in Mexico. The war did not erupt suddenly; it was a consequence of a series of movements that gradually incorporated the Louisiana Territory, the Floridas and Texas, and entailed nearly continual speculation about the advantages and possibilities of absorbing Caribbean islands. Opposition to the war was as clearly articulated as agitation in its favour. Two aspects of the debate are salient here. First, much opposition to the war and acquisition of Mexican territory turned on the question of whether the land could be absorbed without incorporating its inhabitants. Precisely because previous westward expansion had deliberately destroyed or removed (and in its rhetoric ignored) the Native American populations and there was little of what we now call multiculturalism, there was considerable disagreement about whether Mexicans were capable of earning citizenship.

John Calhoun, a long-serving senator, argued that the US had never considered including anyone within the union but 'Caucasians', so that it would be a fatal error to allow Mexicans and Mexican Indians to become the political equals of whites. These people, Calhoun insisted, were not even the equals of the native Cherokee and Choctaw whom the US had already driven into exile. None but the most advanced people were capable of maintaining free government. Calhoun's perspective was widely shared; it represents one of the most - perhaps *the* most - carefully and forcefully articulated arguments in opposition to American expansion throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

While asserting that the U.S. was not in quest of new territories, President Polk did reserve the right to acquire California as indemnification. John O'Sullivan, who coined the 'Manifest Destiny' phrase and is regarded as its chief spokesman, expounded in 1845, before the war, upon 'things this nation will never do. It will never be the forcible subjector of other countries; it will never despoil surrounding territories....' Then he immediately changed his tune, arguing in May 1846, shortly after the onset of war, that the US had been forced by Mexican outrages to waste 'life and treasure' there: how would it reclaim that treasure? California would in time become American anyway, and



it was only meet that 'We therefore insist upon the *immediate acquisition of California*'; the expansionist press echoed his sentiment. But these same editors then realized that California ports would be of little use without easy overland access, and thus O'Sullivan soon proposed that all of northern Mexico be annexed in order to provide a direct route. Even as opponents of the war were levelling charges that penetration of Mexico was indeed intended as a war of conquest, O'Sullivan would insist, in July, that 'Nothing upon earth, or above or below earth, can be farther from the genius and principles of this Republic than the acquisition of territory by military conquest.' The overwhelming contradiction in these points was resolved by a widely shared assumption that the Mexican people would eagerly seek to become part of the US. Even Walt Whitman opined that the Mexicans 'won't need a long coaxing to join the United States'.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time critics marshalled opposition to the War. William Henry Channing, a preacher and editor who had attacked America's 'savage robberies of the Indians', levelled his sights during the war at the aim of 'the leaders and instigators of this infamous business, to extend the "area of freedom" to the shores of California by robbing Mexico of another large mass of her territory [in addition to Texas]'. Theodore Parker, a colleague of Ralph Waldo Emerson, described the war as 'mean and wicked', the logical progression of the 'history of the Anglo-Saxon, [which] for the last three hundred years, has been one of continual aggression, invasion, and extermination'. The war's proponents countered by hailing the conquest's humanitarian character. Stephanson draws attention, for example, to the *American Whig Review*, which supported the 'morally correct purchase of Alta California in the name of humanity'.<sup>11</sup>

There was continual counterpoint between advocates and opponents of expansion, contesting the same moral ground. Some believed a continental (or 'large') policy of expansion to the Pacific (and even to the Arctic and Panama) served not only American interests but was indeed its 'destiny', mandated by its morally superior place in the world's scheme of things. Others (usually drawing on variants of the 'small republic' argument) believed it was neither in the country's material nor spiritual interests to do so. William Seward, who served as Secretary of State, embodied some of these contradictions. Singing the praises of commercial expansion, he spoke of establishing 'the ultimate empire of the ocean' and pushed for a policy of attraction rather than subjugation. 'Since he was convinced that the decisive area of future commercial competition lay in Asia, the acquisition of Hawaii made sense, as did the projection of an isthmian canal and, less obviously, the purchase of Alaska.' Yet he was equally capable of criticising a 'growing passion for territorial aggrandizement' because it led to 'gross disregard for justice and humanity'.<sup>12</sup>

Arguments about the humanitarian virtues of expansion appeared to lead the way during the next major burst of acquisitiveness, when the Spanish-American War came to a head in 1898. President McKinley ignored Spanish attempts to settle on largely American terms, when he determined that he was facing 'an immensely popular war because it was experienced as a humanitarian effort'. And Theodore Roosevelt's ideal of an American empire as the triumph of civilization required that '"waste spaces"... be used in the interest of humanity'.<sup>13</sup>

The coupling of 'waste spaces' or as most thinkers from Jefferson to Frederick Jackson Turner phrased it, 'open land', with humanitarian motives seems to capture much of the dynamic of American expansion from the arrival of the first British colonists until at least the American occupation of Micronesia. Perry Miller's seminal account of the Pilgrim settlements draws its title, *Errand into the Wilderness*, from the sermon of a puritan divine and explores the import of both terms: the wilderness the Europeans take the new world to be and their self-appointed task of redeeming it. At every stage of westward movement the same arguments are mobilised. The territory before them is under- or inadequately used and its inhabitants can only be made to use it properly if they are transformed into clones of Euro-Americans. The principle debate has been whether they are capable of being so transformed or should be shouldered aside. Expansion into the trans-Appalachian frontier, the Spanish and French border lands, and, ultimately into the Caribbean and Pacific has consistently been organized around these themes and debates.<sup>14</sup>

The international humanitarianism of missionary activity has always played an eminent role in American life. The American Board of Commissioners for the Foreign Missions sent its people to many Native American populations in the south and west as well as to Hawai'i and Micronesia, and many parts of Asia. According to Stephanson, 'Christian missionaries were the one consistently "expansionist" feature of American foreign relations after the Civil War; there were boundaries to be crossed and spaces to be conquered.' Moreover, the more distant acquisitions 'were populated by large numbers of people not easily imagined as future Americans.... A classification had to be found for nearly perpetual inferiority, and thus the delicate subject of colonialism was raised'.<sup>15</sup> It was at this juncture that Kipling was moved to counsel America to take up the 'White Man's Burden'.

### Into the Pacific

The US moved into the Pacific as part of a course of action it had found successful for generations. Americans had been pursuing the China trade from before independence, and the government had sent expeditions to the West Coast and the insular Pacific repeatedly. By the Guano Act, Congress had asserted an American right to claim islands as it saw fit and to back up these claims with military force.<sup>16</sup> Hawai'i had been eyed as port and colony for much of the nineteenth century, and when American missions there were well-established it was they who pushed forward into Micronesia. By the 1890s, along with propounding the Open Door policy (to assure American commerce equal access to China via a *laissez faire* internationalism), came well-developed designs on Manila's harbour as a way station providing access to all East Asia.

Theodore Roosevelt, as Assistant Navy Secretary, had Admiral Dewey steaming for Manila even before the US had decided to declare war on Spain over Cuba. He was acting on the strategic dicta of his friend and mentor, Alfred Thayer Mahan (America's greatest geopolitician and theorist of sea power), who was clear about the need for American outposts, and colonies to provision and support them, in every region where commerce would require American control of the seas. After the capture of Manila, Mahan and Roosevelt, among a host of others, were insistent upon acquiring all the Philippines; Whitelaw Reid, a member of the U.S. commission sent to Europe to negotiate the settlement with Spain, wrote excitedly of this new outpost 'directly in front of the Chinese Colossus, on a great territory of our own.' The US, he exclaimed, now commands 'the ocean that according to the old prediction, is to bear the bulk of the world's commerce in the twentieth century'.<sup>17</sup> Yet prominent anti-imperialists such as Carl Schurz, former senator, Interior Secretary, and editor, would continue to insist that annexation of populated territories abroad could not be made consonant with American values: 'the United States, in order to preserve its basic nature, could not take in territories as dominions but only as full members to be; but if one did bring such alien spaces and populations in as full members, the essential character of the country would change anyway.' Others marshalled arguments opposing any move to annex the Philippines, including observations that they would prove strategically more costly than any benefits they might render, that the US had 'no bureaucratic machinery to deal with colonial peoples', and that 'Americans had a very bad record taking care of wards domestically, as evidenced by blacks and Indians'.<sup>18</sup> These would prove to be telling, even prescient, observations.

As it turned out, the Philippines, like Cuba, were occupied long enough for the US to put into place institutions guaranteeing American suzerainty without social or political integration. A more pressing question in the current context is why only Guam was acquired along with the Philippines, when inclusion of all the Marianas and Carolines was being called for in the American press and was certainly among the prerogatives the US considered.<sup>19</sup>

Decolonisation in Micronesia has progressed as a consequence of these arguments, but decolonisation is merely a solution to the problem of reconciling tensions so that all American interests - strategic, commercial and humanitarian - are equally served: those peoples who cannot be fully assimilated must be set free, but precisely because they are deemed incapable of being

assimilated they are incapable of coherently governing themselves. They may be granted manifest or cosmetic autonomy, but as with government under the Pratt Amendment, which transferred government to the Cubans, autonomy was only possible as long as there were constitutional safeguards preventing it from being acted upon if such acts in any way adversely confronted American interests or policies. As Jamaica Kincaid points out, the American nation-state continues to profit from its excursions into and appropriations of other people's lands and resources, no matter what domestic protests are levelled against them.<sup>20</sup>

### Acquiring Micronesia

Earl Pomeroy's *Pacific Outpost* is the most convincing account of the factors and events leading to the decision not to acquire the rest of the Marianas and the Carolines (the remainder of Spain's western Pacific territories) when it annexed the Philippines and Guam. As he points out, the issue of principle interest to the American public and its political leadership during the peace settlement of 1898 'was not whether the Marianas and Carolines should be annexed as well as the Philippines, but rather which, if any, of the Philippines themselves'.<sup>21</sup> For coaling and cable stations, naval leaders contemplated various of the Carolines and Marianas, especially Guam. Commander Stockton, who had spent time in Micronesia, described the Marianas as 'stepping stones....five days easy steaming from all ports of Japan, Korea, Shanghai and Hong Kong'.<sup>22</sup> Commander Bradford, whom the navy detailed to Paris to advise the American peace commission, explained to them that the Carolines would be especially dangerous in unfriendly hands. The Naval War Board concluded, however, that a station in Guam would suffice, 'for naval stations, being points for attack and defense, should not be multiplied beyond the strictly necessary'.<sup>23</sup> Others have attributed this retreat to Mahan's 'fear of overcommitment'.<sup>24</sup> While the subsequent German occupation of Micronesia was immediately described as 'an intentional, deliberate menace to the United States', Mahan himself responded in 1904 that he 'refused a suggestion to use my supposed influence against [German] acquisition of the Carolines, etc.; but [now] her ambitions threaten us as well as Great Britain'.<sup>25</sup> Mahan had consistently seen the problem of reconciling the imperative of concentrating one's forces with the necessity of maintaining overseas stations: he came to believe he had erred in deciding that annexation would stretch American naval forces too thinly. As a consequence, Theodore Roosevelt would describe the American position in the Philippines as the country's Achilles Heel, too far forward and cut off from Hawai'i by foreign occupied territory, to be properly defensible.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, there were significant demands for annexation of the rest of Micronesia, from politicians and missionaries, which Pomeroy describes as having had at least as much impact as naval interests. One influential editorial of June 1898 pronounced it 'our imperative duty to turn the Spaniards out of the Caroline Islands and to restore and guarantee the happy conditions which had been produced by many years of noble American effort before the Spaniards laid their blighting hand upon that island group.' Senator Henry Cabot Lodge informed the navy that because the Carolines and Marianas were dependencies of the Philippines, American claims to them were as good as its claims to the Philippines themselves.<sup>27</sup>

In the end, Germany was allowed to purchase control over the Carolines and all of the Marianas except Guam. In 1914 the Japanese occupied Micronesia. Again the American navy agitated for transfer of Micronesia to the US and again it was denied. The War and Navy Departments' General Board had already begun developing plans for moving across Micronesia into the Philippines in case of hostilities with Japan. After much debate and wrangling, the General Board recommended in 1918 that the U.S. acquire all Micronesia.<sup>28</sup> It appears, however, that President Woodrow Wilson was too eager to get the Japanese into the League of Nations, and out of Shantung and Siberia, to expend diplomatic capital trying to get them out of Micronesia as well. It has also been suggested that pursuit of the Micronesian islands would have made it more difficult for Wilson to achieve the early American withdrawal he hoped to engineer in the Philippines.<sup>29</sup>

The US military had been planning a response to a hypothetical Japanese invasion of the Philippines from the beginning of the century. A number of naval thinkers had been describing the Marshalls and Carolines as 'stepping-stones' for an invasion of the western Pacific - specifically Guam, the Philippines, and Japan - from at least 1915.<sup>30</sup> In his 'coming war' novel of 1925, *The Great Pacific War*, the British naval correspondent Hector Bywater spelled out in extraordinary detail how, after the Japanese had taken Guam and the Philippines using their positions in Micronesia, the US moved through Micronesia island by island. He cited Yap as the key to American advance on Guam and Japan. By 1926 the American navy had already mapped its primary strategy for recapturing Guam from Japan, a 'Step by Step Route' from Pearl Harbour that included 'capture, occupation, and use of the Marshalls, Carolines, and possibly Marianas, Yap, and Pelews'. It was, Hoonan writes, 'a plan that could have been lifted directly from the pages of *The Great Pacific War*'. Unfortunately, Admiral Yamamoto was in the same year 'proposing the strategy for Japan that he had read about in Bywater'.<sup>31</sup>

It is in this context that the military's insistence upon seizing Micronesia permanently must be comprehended. As Pomeroy put it, 'In 1919, as in 1939, it seemed to many that it was twenty years too late'.<sup>32</sup> Although historians have demonstrated that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour was less of a surprise than it was represented, 'Pearl Harbour' provoked enormous recrimination both within the military and between the military and Congress.

Guam and the Philippines had been left virtually unfortified and fell immediately. The Micronesian islands were nearly universally understood to have provided the Japanese with a superhighway to these targets. Having twice failed to obtain these 'stepping stones', and having suffered the ignominy of its 1941 losses as a consequence, the US military was not to be denied a third time. 'Never again!', cried Senator Thomas Hart. Hart wrote, 'Our failure to acquire the Caroline, Marshall, and Marianas Islands at the same time we shouldered the responsibility for the Philippines amounted to one of the most costly politico-military mistakes that any nation has ever made'.<sup>33</sup> 'Remember Pearl Harbor!' has been the guiding principle of America in Micronesia for five decades.

The major American buildup in Micronesia peaked during the war, as the reconquest of Guam was followed by invasions of the Ryukyus and the Philippines. A *New York Times* reporter in Guam in 1944 filed his observation that 'We are not building this for today, we are building it for the future.' Perhaps more significant was the transformation of 'the popular estimate of its value, and of the values of its neighbours in Micronesia and adjacent groups'.<sup>34</sup> Pomeroy cites pages of commentary from every sector of American leadership in the mid-1940s regarding the imperative of retaining Micronesia. Admiral Ernest King, commanding officer of the Navy, captures this outlook.

*These atolls, these island harbors will have been paid for by the sacrifice of American blood....*

*Failure to maintain these bases essential for our own defense raises the fundamental question - how long can the United States afford to continue a cycle of fighting and winning and giving away, only to fight and build and win and give away again?*<sup>35</sup>

Any lingering doubts about Micronesia's strategic significance had been erased. Even if they would not all be developed as bases, the importance of strategic denial was now established. James Forrestal, who was Navy Secretary and then the first U.S. Defense Secretary, explained in the *New York Times* (24 September 1946) 'Single island positions cannot be considered strong bases. Selected islands can, however, together with Guam, form a far-reaching, mutually supporting base network, although each alone would fall far short of being an impregnable bastion'.

Any but a summary account of the struggles among US military and diplomatic establishments to determine the status of Micronesia would be too long for my purposes. The ground has been covered by a number of scholars, and will undoubtedly be tilled again. Roger Louis's *Empire at*

Bay details the byzantine contest between the Navy and State Departments that flowed from Roosevelt's desire to see European colonial empires dismantled. Despite basic agreement with his military strategists, Roosevelt, who personally formulated and conducted much foreign policy, seems to have remained insistent that the US would only administer the islands via a United Nations trust; he reiterated this commitment the day before his death, and the degree of his resolve apparently convinced Harry Truman to refuse outright annexation.

The conclusions of Louis and Lester Foltos are largely congruent. The dispute between State and Defense was primarily over the form of the American regime in Micronesia, rather than its nature. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had established a 'blue zone' marking a perimeter perceived vital to the direct defense of the U.S., running from Alaska and Hawai'i to the Philippines. 'In its center was the keystone of the proposed base system - the Marshall, Marianas, and Caroline island groups that Japan held under mandate.'<sup>36</sup> Permanent control was deemed necessary to restore America's geographic isolation, perceived to have been grossly violated at Pearl Harbor. Moreover, units based in this western Pacific preserve would also serve as 'an umbrella to shield Japan's tremendous military potential from any would-be aggressor'.

Confronted with the State Department's opposition to annexation, the Joint Chiefs denied that this course ran counter to any supposed tradition of anti-imperialism. 'They believed', rather, that 'it was in keeping with America's noble and beneficent foreign policy tradition.' While European imperialism derived from selfish economic interests, they explained, 'American motives were pure'. Indeed the Joint Chiefs argued that State's position was 'cynical', given that it would provide the U.S. with all the attributes of sovereignty over the Micronesians while denying them any of its rights or benefits.<sup>37</sup> In his study of the navy's public relations efforts, Vincent Davis describes the aggressive tactics of its Office of Public Relations, which provided materials for speeches, articles, and congressional testimony, noting the recurring use of key phrases and arguments.<sup>38</sup> Truman obliged his subordinates to continue working toward some sort of agreement. The State Department eventually achieved a format more or less acceptable to both sides. 'Under the revised terms the United States, as administering authority, would have virtually unlimited powers over the trusteeships. The State Department added an insurance clause to guarantee the permanent control the JCS insisted on.' As a consequence,

*American possession of the keystone to the JCS Pacific strategy was assured. The price had been high. During the war the administration had quietly dropped plans to use trusteeship to end colonialism. Now it had all but eliminated hope that the residents of the trusteeships could use trusteeship to win independence.*<sup>39</sup>

This conclusion runs somewhat contrary to that of Louis, who maintains that despite the costs to Micronesians, American commitment to decolonisation ultimately triumphed over British resistance via implementation of the UN trusteeship program.<sup>40</sup> In the end, budget cuts reduced American requirements in Micronesia to denial, contingency basing rights, and the military's steadfast refusal to countenance negotiations that could lead to anything that might remotely be termed 'independence' for Micronesia.<sup>41</sup>

## Decolonisation

In 'Decolonisation and Beyond', Barrie Macdonald drew attention to the constitutional options open to and employed by Pacific nation-states, noting that degrees of constitutional independence do not correlate closely with economic, political, and strategic autonomy. Independence has, nevertheless, symbolic importance and the quest for it can play a crucial role even when it is not achieved.<sup>42</sup> Because the Pacific island states have proved so dependent upon aid, and state institutions channel that aid, there has been considerable emphasis on maintaining the territorial integrity that underlies these states. Indeed, he argues, 'fear of losing aid in the uncertain world of independence helped to generate support for less-than-independent constitutions'. Moreover, whatever their former colonial relations, all the South Pacific countries remain in some sense 'firmly under the United States

nuclear umbrella'. Limitations over foreign affairs and defence, received in turn for security in economic matters, 'are no less real for countries which have moved to sovereign independence than for those which have not'. Micronesia's decolonisation history is in most matters little different than that of the rest of the insular Pacific.

Nevertheless, Micronesia's strategic value remained crucial in Macdonald's opinion, and was enhanced by changes in the American position on Okinawa and affected by possible modifications in the status of US bases in the Philippines. He deemed it 'almost inevitable' that the US would 'take a much tougher stance in negotiations over political status compacts in regard to strategic denial and access to land of potential military importance'.

It appears to many observers that the old Micronesian Trust Territory has evolved into four fully realised polities, three independent and one an integral part (if not member) of the United States. The US government as well as the Micronesian governments refer to Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshalls as independent. The consensus seems to agree with Boneparth and Wilkinson that 'with UN membership, legal questions about the sovereignty and independence of the [three] countries were essentially overcome.' In their perspective, the only significant question remaining is the possibility of 'profound and economically adverse consequences for the islands' as a result of declining U.S. strategic interests in the area, which have 'changed dramatically' although they have not vanished. 'American strategists consider the possibility that some power could in years to come develop hostile intentions and threaten U.S. interests in the region'.<sup>43</sup>

The State Department's Pacific islands desk officer, Edward Michal, has tried to establish the legal roots for the new Micronesian states' independence, although his explication does offer several caveats. Michal explains that the US prohibits Micronesian participation in the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. The FSM, he explains, is unlikely to challenge this US position 'because an American rebuff - which could not be kept quiet - would impair its claim to political independence'.<sup>44</sup> The Micronesian republics are free to claim they are independent only so long as they do not attempt to act independently.

But in a more day-to-day context, the key portion of the compacts lies not so much in the mutual security annexes as in Section 312, which specifies that the freely associated states 'shall refrain from actions which the Government of the United States determines, after appropriate consultation with those Governments, to be incompatible with its authority and responsibility for security and defense matters'. I have argued that Micronesians had every right to declare their independence, but that the US should refrain from such proclamations unless and until it agrees to rewrite the compacts so that some of the more onerous controls are modified enough to resemble something more like the independence the Micronesians were claiming.<sup>45</sup>

### **Into the future**

I argue that the importance of the Micronesian islands in US strategic thinking will increase after the Cold War, contrary to the conclusions of Gary Smith,<sup>46</sup> who explains that Micronesia was - is - not nearly so critical to the American military as either the military or politicians have represented. Describing the decolonisation of Micronesia as a failure rooted in 'the exaggeration of Micronesia's strategic importance to the United States, and the dominance of the military in decolonisation policy making', he disputes the widely shared assumption 'that the strategic value of Micronesia was, and is, an absolute, a strategic imperative which has forced non-military objectives into a distant second place.' The US, he argues, did not see Micronesia as an area of strategic import until after the Japanese had occupied it: 'assumptions about the strategic significance of Micronesia arose directly from the experience of Japanese aggression in the Second World War'.

However, the American presence is by no means solely a consequence of World War Two. From well before its founding, the U.S. was committed to westward expansion. The navy had long-

standing designs on the Carolines and Marianas and it was the navy's earlier failure to acquire the islands that provoked near-unanimous insistence upon acquiring them in perpetuity after the war with Japan. While it appears that the strategic trusteeship was intended to accomplish the same goals as annexation, it was in fact entirely in keeping with an equally well-established precept of American expansionist policy: that populations who were not of essentially Anglo-American stock could not be integrated into the union and that, in order to preserve the republic's character they should not be absorbed. The relevant questions are how the decolonisation of Micronesia demonstrates the broader pattern of American imperial practices, and what the close of the Cold War era will mean for US-Micronesian relations.

### Geopolitics

In order to meld American expansionist drives with strategic policy in the western Pacific, it is necessary to recall some of the key elements of geopolitics. Mahan believed that the US could only be strong as long as it was a major trading nation and that it could establish and preserve this role only by projecting sea power. This required a chain of bases to support the fleet, and colonies to support the bases. Mahan's vision and recommendations coincided almost exactly with a long expansion in American naval strength and reach, which was only briefly sided-tracked after the Washington Naval Conference of 1923. During this same period Harold Mackinder responded to Mahan with his visions of world geopolitics, which portrayed the world in terms of a 'Heartland' (largely coterminous with Russia) and an area that would be called the 'Rimland', the 'crush zone', or 'shatterbelt' - the province of sea power.<sup>47</sup>

N.J. Spykman in his influential *The Geography of the Peace* believed Mackinder was wrong in asserting that control of the Heartland conferred a capacity to control the world; it should be, he wrote, 'Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia'.<sup>48</sup> This control had to be maintained through a combination of sea and air power, and air power required bases. Power struggles in the Eastern hemisphere would always concern relations between the Heartland and Rimland and would be influenced by maritime pressure on the littoral. 'If Western Powers are to retain any influence at all in the region, they will have to establish island bases for their power.' These 'bases will probably be sufficient to counterbalance any future attempt of China to dominate the Far East completely.' Accordingly, the region of most immediate concern for the US is the 'contact area between the littoral of Eurasia and the string of marginal seas which surrounds it'.

*There is no geopolitical area in the world that has been more profoundly affected by the development of air power than this one of the marginal seas. No longer is sea power effective without air power, and aircraft has little strength if based on small, widely-separated areas. [In East Asia the primary threat to the balance of power has in the past come from] the nation which has been in posit to control the sea access to the mainland littoral, but the U.S. has never had a really effective base for her power. If we are seriously interested in maintaining the security of the Orient, and for our own safety we are forced to be, we must secure additional naval and air bases on the same terms by which we acquired them in the transatlantic zone. The augmentation of Alaska with bases on some of the mandated islands and the re-establishment of our military power in the Philippines would be a minimum arrangement.*<sup>49</sup>

O'Sullivan maintains that what Mahan proposed as American naval strategy is almost precisely what the US then set out to accomplish. Spykman reintroduced Mahan's thought after a brief hiatus and proposed the geopolitical strategy that underpinned the policy of containment.<sup>50</sup> American strategic policy makers and planners since then 'have driven themselves into a frenzy of effort trying to plug all possible holes in the Rimland dike'.<sup>51</sup>

### American Imperialism after the Cold War

These sentiments characterise the Cold War outlook, but the strategic worldview that underlies

them is far older, has great continuity, and is likely to persist. Present-day US interests in 'stability' in the Western Pacific have at last begun to realise some of the commercial dreams that have driven America's expansion since the earliest days of the republic. Trade across the northern Pacific is undeniably increasing. Transport costs and the need to control sea lanes in order to project power ashore will assure the continuing pursuit of control of these seas.<sup>52</sup> And where land bases on foreign soil are patently provocative, aircraft carriers can be effective without the same degree of insult.

How have the events and trends of the past ten years compared with Barrie Macdonald's outlook? Confusion about American colonialism stands in the way of any clear evaluation of where Micronesia is today, and where it is likely to be headed in its relations with the US. Americans have generally denied a history of colonial activity and are thus somewhat ideologically - if not pragmatically - confused by the processes of decolonisation. Many American historians have argued over whether, as Richard Hofstadter put it, the US was surprised to find itself imperial in 1898, or that this 'accidental empire' was the product of a continuous pragmatic effort.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless Martin Glassner argues that 'in a real sense the United States acquired two separate empires consecutively: one continental and the other (with one exception) insular.' He observes that 'the empire of the United States was acquired enthusiastically but administered absentmindedly.' This 'second American empire' differs from other overseas colonial empires in that 'it is never officially (and rarely unofficially) called an empire. Nor are the individual units ever referred to as colonies because the United States is ambivalent at best and perhaps even embarrassed at having a colonial empire.' Few American citizens have been or are now aware of the empire.<sup>54</sup>

Kiste observes that Americans' myths about their own country 'have obscured their understanding of their nation's role in both the Pacific and the larger world.' Americans 'firmly believe' that the U.S. has not been a colonial power, and this 'American inability to see itself as a colonial power had significant consequences'.<sup>55</sup> Kiste's observation is rather mild in the face of the assertion of 'America's unique and long-standing anti-colonial heritage dramatised in its own revolutionary birth', which presents 'the obvious paradox of itself becoming the colonial master of overseas possessions.' The US 'heritage of both conscious and subconscious anti-colonialism...has plagued both the American government and its citizens in their attitudes toward control over non-contiguous lands and peoples.' As a consequence, American hegemony must be unquestionably temporary and American dominion 'must be made to appear as un-colonial as possible', and it is thus that 'Micronesia, in the American official psyche, has never been a colony'.<sup>56</sup> In the aftermath of World War Two, John Useem, working in the ethnographic study of Micronesia, wrote of US inexperience in 'governing alien cultures'.<sup>57</sup> But as early as 1944, Laura Thompson, an anthropologist who had worked on Guam before the war, dismissed this notion. She developed her point that the US had long been a colonial power and a rather incompetent one at that.<sup>58</sup> No amount of insight seems likely to change most Americans' minds. America appears imperial just about everywhere but at home.

The US recently deployed two carrier divisions into the Formosa Straits as a signal of continuing commitment in the area. There appears little likelihood of rapprochement between the two Chinas, and independence for Taiwan would only fan separatist fires in Tibet, Mongolia, Sinkiang, Manchuria, and other areas of less than complete Han domination. Wrangling between China and Southeast Asian states over the Spratly and Paracel archipelagoes, and between Japan and the two Chinas over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, are merely the tip of undersea mountains - sites where the possibility of petroleum deposits have exacerbated boundary disputes that have been contested, in some cases, for a millennium. Japan and Russia remain at odds over the Kurile chain. Agitation for an American pullout from Okinawa shows no signs of subsiding, while the US insists that Okinawa plays a critical role in promoting stability. The reversion of Hong Kong to China may well result in disturbances that draw outside attention. With the award of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize to East Timorese activists, Indonesia's presence there will undoubtedly come under closer scrutiny. The



Rimland dike is fissured with cracks that the US intends to keep under close observation.

I do not suggest that the US is likely to push for the construction of bases in most of Micronesia. But Kwajalein, though portrayed as the terminal point of American ballistic missile testing that originates in California, stands as a forward defense position of considerable importance. Far more significant, however, is the geographical relationship of the Federated States of Micronesia to Guam and the Northern Marianas Commonwealth, both (apparently permanent) American possessions. The FSM straddles the Marianas, with the line of atolls linking Yap and Chuuk crossing a T due south of Guam. And Belau occupies a large piece of ocean along the route from Indonesia to Japan.

Although Belau's Compact of Free Association runs until the middle of the next century, the FSM and Marshalls compacts end in 2001. All three republics now assert their complete independence, but we must ask if the US believes that these islands have truly achieved a status different from that of the old Trust Territory. Of course the US acknowledges their right to self-government and participation in international organisations. But precisely because the US does not believe that these islands were ever colonies, neither does it consider them decolonised. The same psychological 'denial' mechanisms regarding its role as a colonising power now keep it from acknowledging its continued hold - not merely leverage - over Micronesia.

The US has always tried to explain to itself that its expansionist activities have been humanitarian. Today, interventionism is almost entirely cast as humanitarian, and its most open disputes with China, for instance, are formulated as issues of human rights. Throughout its occupation of Micronesia the US see-sawed between admitting that its concerns were primarily related to its own military security, and claiming that its presence was mainly to uplift and develop the Micronesians; Americans have problems admitting to ambivalence and ambiguity in their political realm. Yet this is precisely what will resurface in Micronesia. As tensions in the Far East become increasingly fractious, the US will fall back on its humanitarian identity and reassert (not re-establish) its hegemony in Micronesia. In doing so it will be following an old pattern.

As an outgrowth of both American pushes for expansion, and opposition to it, over several centuries, the US evolved a highly rationalised, and seemingly successful, means of using decolonisation as a means of achieving the highest stage of imperialism. It is not alone. The process, common to most situations, has been ably described by Harry Magdoff.

*The end of colonialism by no means signifies the end of imperialism. The explanation of this seeming paradox is that colonialism, considered as the direct application of military and political force was essential to reshape the social and economic institutions of many of the dependent countries to the needs of the metropolitan centers. Once this reshaping had been accomplished economic forces...were by themselves sufficient to perpetuate and indeed intensify the relationship of dominance and exploitation between mother country and colony. In these circumstances the colony could be granted formal political independence without changing anything essential, and without interfering too seriously with the interests which had originally led to the conquest of the colony.<sup>59</sup>*

Macdonald puts forward essentially the same premise for the Pacific:

*Decolonization meets the expectations of both the colonized and the United Nations while serving the continued interests of the colonial powers.*

*While independence may seem a break with the colonial past, the continuities are rather more important because they establish the framework for future developments.<sup>60</sup>*

And it is in this sense that we understand Yash Ghai's observation that constitutions transfer authority to a local elite who have been so well-schooled in colonial forms and values that independence, 'far from marking the end of colonialism, can be viewed as its culmination, recording and consolidating the final victory of the westernised, Christianised, urbanised elites, in

control of the formal structured states'.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

The philosopher Leibniz, in the employ of the Duke of Hanover, who was struggling to maintain his claim to sovereignty in the wake of the Peace of Westphalia, set out to determine the status of rulers who were 'subjects' of the Emperor. 'Could one be "sovereign" and "subject" at the same time?' Leibniz established that 'sovereignty' could be distinguished from 'majesty'. The majesty of the emperor over the empire's members drew upon a number of jurisdictions that conferred the right to obedience and fealty, but it was not sovereignty, which could only be established by force of arms.<sup>62</sup> In Herz's words, 'the transition to modern compartmentalised sovereignties was neither easy, nor straight, nor short. Modern sovereignty arose out of the triangular struggle among emperors and popes, popes and kings, and kings and emperors'. Sovereignty for today's ex-colonies arises out of a similar struggle: among the metropolitan powers, the colonies, and the United Nations. Once achieved, it does not exist apart from the struggles that produced it. Sovereignty for smaller states, at least, exists only so long as it is pursued, demanded, and doubted.

I pretend to no new insight. I simply demonstrate that the US has since its beginnings had an active, well-thought-out, and highly successful colonial policy. It evolved in response to the dynamics of American social, political and economic institutions, domestic opposition to them, frontier circumstances, and struggles of local populations to retain control over their lives and lands. American occupation of Micronesia was in no way novel - it came about as a consequence of a long-term interest in acquiring and protecting markets in the western Pacific. 'Decolonisation' of Micronesia has also been a part of this pattern; it perhaps renders American use of the territory more palatable to Americans, to Micronesians, and to the world community, but it is of no less value, and indeed is probably of more value to American self-esteem, than the more formal colonial rule the US exercised - and denied - during its trusteeship.

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**The US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands:  
A Paradox of 'Independent' Dependency**

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*I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.*

Abraham Lincoln

Benign neglect as well as distance have concealed the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands from general view, but there is little question that relations between the Western Pacific entity and the US government are severely strained. At the close of the cold-war, when the US should be basking in the light of successes internationally, the nation's policy in the CNMI (and the US Territories generally) stands in symbolic dissonance. Indeed, anti-federalism directed at the Federal government in the Pacific has reached a sustained point, while local problems such as allegations of labour abuse against foreign and minority workers, preferential and/or discriminatory property rights policy, as well as immigration and minimum wage controversies embarrass the US. This has resulted in the US moving to step up Federal presence and regulation in the islands, with the Commonwealth's leaders demanding greater autonomy.

This paper examines the political and governmental relationship between the US and the CNMI in terms of constitutional principles, and the theory and practice of American federalism. US territorial relations and agreements in the Pacific and elsewhere have produced a profoundly complicated and perplexing image of inconsistency, coupled with apparent misunderstanding of both constitutionalism and federalism. The Commonwealth agreement reached with the CNMI is particularly fraught with contradictory language which is in large part responsible for the present tensions and difficulties. The island entity is politically and economically dependent on the US, but in authentic 'anti-federal' form, consistently emphasises the desire for independence while remaining in that dependency. This distressing state of affairs is characteristic of US territorial relations generally. Illuminating the relationship between the US and the Northern Mariana Islands may therefore serve as a precursor to the resolution of political struggles in the Western Pacific and the development and refinement of consistent and clear US territorial policy over all.

**US Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.**

Sufficient time has elapsed for the memory of the American involvement in the Pacific arena of the Second World war to fade. The structure of world affairs appears to be in transition, and the bi-polar nature of the cold-war international system is increasingly eroding.<sup>1</sup> However, the Allies' triumph in the Second World War and subsequent American global involvement vis-a-vis the Soviet Union is of critical importance in understanding the politics of Micronesia. The islands and atolls have been subject to foreign discovery and control since the sixteenth century, first by the Spanish followed by the Germans, the Japanese, and up to the present the Americans. Of particular bearing is the initial reluctance of the US to become extensively involved in international politics in any permanent fashion, only to be obligated by events in the twentieth century to play a major role in world affairs. In the Western Pacific, following Pearl Harbor, the US initiated a large-scale military campaign to liberate the islands from Japanese occupation. The effort eventually led to American administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). The new Trust Territory was turned over to the US Navy on July 19, 1947, at which time the United States was confronted with a new and unfamiliar experience of governing a distant ocean region that had been devastated by assault.

The US, as Administrator of the TTPI, addressed the problems associated with re-building the communities from the ground up, including 'transportation, education, farming, fishing, banking, public utilities, and postal services'.<sup>2</sup> The Americans also divided the region into six districts: Pohnpei, Truk, Yap (now the Federated States of Micronesia), the Northern Mariana Islands, Marshalls, and Palau; and instituted local governments which were democratic in form.

US involvement derived from a massive military confrontation and America's national interests in the region were in this way based largely upon military/strategic considerations associated with the Cold War and a nuclear age.<sup>3</sup> Intriguingly, following centuries of external domination, the interests of the island Territories were mainly rooted in the desire for self-assertion, cultural protection, and political independence - all to be achieved through economic, military and political assistance. While the US and the Trust Territories mutually benefited from the association, a more pronounced divergence of their objectives (along with the role of the United Nations) marks a basic point of tension politically as there was a need to clarify the status of the Territories.

The Trusteeship Agreement required the US to promote the development of the inhabitants of the TTPI toward 'self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Trust Territory and its peoples and the freely elected expressed wishes of the people concerned'.<sup>4</sup>

While the TTPI viewed this relationship as one which would provide temporary assistance toward greater autonomy, the US considered its administrative effort to be directed at including the territories as an integral part of the nation, leading toward 'self' or 'local' government within the American political system. The disparity was grounded in a basic conflict between the United Nations principles of Trusteeship and US principles of constitutional, federal democracy.

This divergence of purposes was instrumentally addressed through a new and unique political status called FAS (Freely Associated State) which would allow for vicarious association between the US and a Territory based upon four fundamental principles:

- 1) That Sovereignty in Micronesia resides in the people of Micronesia;
- 2) That the people of Micronesia possess the right to self-determination and may therefore choose independence or self-government in free association with any nation(s);
- 3) That the people of Micronesia have the right to adopt their own constitution, and to amend, change or revoke any constitution or government plan at any time; and
- 4) That free-association should be in the form of a revocable compact, terminable unilaterally by either party.<sup>5</sup>

FAS status allows for the interests of the Territories and the US to be met through a temporary alliance based on a confederal model, a relationship which is closer to that of two separate countries tied by an arrangement of convenience, but which are unrelated constitutionally. FAS stipulations of local sovereignty, local right to self-determination, local right to revoke any constitution, and right to revoke any compact with any nation without mutual agreement all clearly indicate the unconstitutional nature of such a political status (meaning that an FAS compact in no way suggests political unification of a Territory and the US).

The Trust Territories cannot be considered as an integration (the drawing of political boundaries notwithstanding) since the peoples of the region are culturally, ethnically, linguistically and geographically diverse. In fact, 'of all the problems facing Micronesia, the achievement of unity is the greatest'.<sup>6</sup> This profound diversity militates against nationalism of any kind. FAS status in this way provides for the Trust Territories to maintain local distinctions.

The US, through FAS agreements, obtains important military and strategic access in exchange for cash payments and the maintenance of defence responsibilities. What is important is the instrumental nature of the association. Directly, FAS status recommends that a Territory is politically 'independent' while

remaining dependent economically and in terms of defence. The following points distinguish FAS status from other traditional status forms:

- 1) unilateral ability of FAS to end the relationship;
- 2) the lack of U.S. citizenship of the FAS residents;
- 3) the capacity of the FAS to engage in world affairs as an international sovereign;
- 4) the capacity of the FAS to have a distinct and separate fiscal/monetary system.<sup>7</sup>

A Compact of Free-Association is fundamentally rooted in the protection of local autonomy, and contains stipulations which preclude political unification between the two entities within the American constitutional system. While the nature of FAS is contractual and confederal, unification in the US system must be constitutional and federal. Whereas an FAS has the unilateral ability to end a political relationship, secession in the US has no precedent (the Civil War being one example). While FAS residents do not possess US citizenship, within the US, citizenship and the governmental protection of the rights and responsibilities of such is of primary importance. Finally, the capacity to engage in diplomacy and maintain a distinct monetary and fiscal systems which an FAS possesses is constitutionally reserved to the federal government in the US.

### **The Establishment of a US Commonwealth**

The Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau closely followed U.N. principles rather than US experience in selecting Compacts of 'Free-Association' with the US. Only one district sought a form of political status aimed at closer association with the US. The Northern Mariana Islands negotiated a separate agreement to create a Commonwealth. Unlike the peoples of the other districts, in February 1961 a United Nations Visiting Mission reported that the people of the NMI had an almost unanimous desire for US citizenship.<sup>8</sup> Following a favourable referendum in the territory and passage as federal law by the US Congress, on 15 February 1975, a Commonwealth agreement establishing a political unification and granting US citizenship was successfully reached.

The Covenant is, however, both unclear and contradictory. The Covenant Agreement contains language inconsistent with US constitutional law and principles as well as the theory and practice of American federalism. The Agreement states that the people of the Northern Marianas, by establishing a Commonwealth, 'were exercising their sovereign inalienable right of self-determination',<sup>9</sup> and that their desire for political union with the US would be fulfilled. Section 101 of the Covenant which outlines the political relationship between the two entities states that upon termination of the U.N. Trusteeship Agreement, the NMI would become 'a self-governing Commonwealth in political union with and under the sovereignty of the United States of America'.<sup>10</sup>

Two initial points should be made. First, the Covenant appears to represent an unmistakable act of self-determination and popular sovereignty by the people of the Northern Marianas. Second, this act is quasi-constitutive in so far as it is grounded in the formal establishment of 'union' with the US. With respect to the former, in both theory and established practice once a people have formally engaged their sovereign right of self-determination, 'no residual right remains within any group within it or cutting across its frontiers'.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the latter, since the Covenant specifies that the Commonwealth will be 'in political union with and under the sovereignty of' the United States', the people of the NMI, presumably at the point of establishing their Commonwealth, became one self-governing entity among many including the several States of the Union.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, upon unifying with the US, the people of the Northern Marianas constituted themselves as one with the people of the US through acceptance of American citizenship, and constituted themselves institutionally through the establishment of a Commonwealth which was joined with the United States government and Constitution.

Yet questions remain. Was the Agreement legitimate? Were the people of the NMI fully cognizant of the meaning and purpose of the Covenant? Were the people of the United States made fully aware, and did they participate directly in the process? Finally, can US citizenship be rightfully granted and

political 'union' established absent 'Statehood' in constitutional terms?

To constitute, in the political sense, means to make one out of many. The motto *E pluribus unum* suggests 'the making of one people out of many persons, as well as the making of one country out of many colonies'.<sup>13</sup> When the people of the NMI petitioned separately for US citizenship and closer association with the US and were granted that citizenship, they constituted themselves with the people of the US. Once citizenship is obtained, the term 'the people' means the people of the United States or the 'American' people. Citizenship is in this way a constitutive act which makes the people of the NMI part of one larger society through mutual trust.<sup>14</sup> However, if US citizenship is to be taken seriously, must it not be granted and accepted in a constitutionally legitimate fashion?

While the Commonwealth Agreement grants citizenship to all persons born in the Northern Marianas which includes 'all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States', at issue is whether, and to what extent, the US Constitution applies in the Commonwealth. If US citizenship is to be meaningful, associated rights and responsibilities of citizenship must be constitutionally protected and upheld by the rule of law. Indeed, the main purpose of constitutional government is to secure both the public good and private rights.<sup>15</sup> This points to a question of critical importance - does the Commonwealth Agreement fulfill these objectives? US citizenship has been established for individuals in the CNMI, but can such citizenship be taken seriously if the Agreement and its provisions are constitutionally deficient?

### **The Constitutionality of the NMI-US Commonwealth**

To understand whether or not, and to what degree, the Commonwealth Agreement upholds constitutional principles and objectives, it is necessary to examine the assertions on which it is based. Careful examination of the Covenant reveals a number of complex inconsistencies which derive from conflicting intentions of the two entities. These contradictions are, in all likelihood, the direct result of producing an agreement which combines and blurs opposing and even paradoxical political goals.

The CNMI was initially a Trust Territory and not a Territory of the US (unlike Guam, which became a US Territory after being acquired from Spain in 1898). The objectives of the Trust Territories, which were supported by the United Nations, are incompatible with constitutionalism in failing to recognize US sovereignty, retaining the right to self-determination for the Micronesian peoples, and by reserving the right of each of the Trust Territories to unilaterally terminate association with any nation or nations.<sup>16</sup> These goals were, not surprisingly, implicitly pursued by the NMI in Commonwealth negotiations. This resulted in an Agreement which reflects an incompatible mixture of TTPI goals with US constitutional requirements.

The Trust Territory objectives appear to closely outline the properties of a form of political association called 'federacy'. FAS (Freely-Associated State) status, which was offered to the other Trust Territories through Compacts of Free Association, is a form of federacy. Federacy denotes a kind of political relationship between a small polity which is freely, not constitutionally, joined with a larger country. Federacy permits small communities to maintain their cultural identity through separate political organisation while receiving economic, political, and military assistance from a more powerful nation.<sup>17</sup>

The Chamorro people of the Northern Mariana Islands approached negotiations with the desire to form an agreement which would retain as much local autonomy and distinction as possible in an effort to preserve the indigenous culture and ethnic identity, but which would also provide the benefits of citizenship and association with the US. Both parties therefore contemplated that the Northern Marianas' form of self-government would be more expansive than that enjoyed by States. The inherent irony of this approach is the basic fragility of the NMI on the one hand (dominated by foreign powers for centuries), and the provision of greater local autonomy and power with major economic, financial and military assistance on the other. While the NMI was a dependent micro-state in nearly every sense, the Covenant was intended to make the Islands more 'independent' politically than the various States



of the Union.<sup>18</sup>

These objectives were achieved by inserting specific language into the Agreement which would reserve powers for the local entity not provided for in the US Constitution. For example Section 102 asserts the supremacy of the Covenant in terms of the governmental relationship vis a vis the United States. The clause, in effect, serves to 'elevate the Covenant above all other sources of lawmaking and, to the extent enumerated, above all other applicable provisions of the United States Constitution.' While Section 101 expressly states that the Commonwealth is 'in political union with and under the sovereignty of the United States of America', Section 102 maintains that the Covenant (not the US Constitution) would govern NMI-US relations. Section 105 specifies that 'in order to respect the right of self-government guaranteed by the Covenant' certain portions of US constitutional authority would be limited (Articles I, II, III, and Sections 501 and 805 'may be modified only with consent of both the US Government and the Government of the CNMI'). This language incorporates the doctrine of 'mutual consent' placing the US and the NMI in relative symmetry with each other, which is the purpose of FAS status and federacy.

The Covenant creates a form of political status which is unknown in constitutional terms. This is related in part to the fact that the formal constitutional distribution of power and arrangement of institutional structures in the US is 'federal'. Federalism distributes power 'between constituent state governments and the government of the union in terms of shared "powers"'.<sup>19</sup> In the US, federalism was implemented primarily to remedy the weaknesses of the confederal structure of the Articles of Confederation by creating a more perfect union as well as 'a form of political organization particularly suited to linking distinctive and separate communities into a single political system.' The NMI Commonwealth Covenant, conversely, produces a quasi-confederal relationship between the US and the island entity by way of the Covenant Supremacy and Mutual Consent clauses.

The basic difference between confederation and federation is grounded in the political unit(s) which each recognise, emphasise and preserve. In confederation, the constituent states are the only political units that are parties in the association, whereas in federation, the constituent states are joined by individual citizens as parties to the arrangement. The US Constitution was expressly intended to protect and pursue what constituent states and factional groups either cannot or do not: the private rights of individual citizens, and the public good.<sup>20</sup> In federation, 'the goal of creating a political union involves political integration which extends throughout the entire society. This is accomplished via formal constitutional arrangement and the citizenship of individuals is based upon enduring, cohesive, and unifying principles such as equality before the law and the protection of basic human rights.'

The Commonwealth Agreement provides for a contradictory mixture of confederation and federation. First, while the Covenant places the NMI in political union with and under the sovereignty of the United States (as opposed to free association), it also places limitations and conditions upon the Federal Government which are unconstitutional. The Agreement establishes a union between the US and the NMI Commonwealth where no constitutional authority exists for such an establishment. Only 'States' can be legitimately placed in political union within the US constitutional system.

The 'republican' scheme of representation which the Constitution provides for requires the democratic selection of elected representatives at the state and national levels of government: the people rule indirectly by choosing leaders to engage in public policy decision-making at both levels. The Constitution demands that the citizenry be fully represented in each sphere. At the national level representation is based upon a variety of criteria such as population in state electoral districts (the House of Representatives), statehood (the Senate), a numerical combination of the two (the Electoral College), and Executive-Legislative coordination (the selection and confirmation of Supreme Court Justices). The Constitution provides for similar institutional and representative schemes at the state level of government.

In order for US citizens to be properly represented in the Federal Constitutional system, they must reside in one of the fifty states where the Constitution is fully applicable. The Covenant between the

NMI and the US establishes a Commonwealth, not a State, and fails to provide the individual citizens necessary representation locally and nationally. The CNMI Senate is based upon equal representation for the islands of Rota, Tinian, and Saipan and not upon proportional representation and the equal-population principle.

This equal representation scheme based upon islands and not individual voters conflicts directly with the 14th and 15th Amendments of the US Constitution since the population of Saipan is six times greater than the other two combined.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the CNMI has no formal representation at the national level. Section 901 of the Covenant states that the NMI Constitution or laws may provide for either the appointment or election of a 'non-voting' Resident Representative to the United States whose term in office will be determined by local law. The Resident Representative is, according to the Agreement, entitled to official recognition by all departments and agencies of the Government of the US. NMI representation at the national level is therefore non-existent in the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches of government and the role of the Resident Representative is constitutionally undefined.

The Commonwealth Agreement provides US citizenship for all individuals who reside within the boundaries of the NMI, but effectively denies them adequate representation and proper constitutional protection. The granting and acceptance of US citizenship establishes a union between the people of the NMI and the people of the United States. The political arrangement, however, does not provide for the representation and protection of the rights of that citizenship. US citizenship requires that the rights of individual citizens are protected, and necessitates the operation of federalism so that citizens can participate directly in the political system at all levels. The Covenant disallows such participation and is based upon the preservation of local autonomy and relative political independence from the US. This produces a political relationship which is more confederal than federal in which:

*the sense of common citizenship is remote and more appropriately compared to the sense of common identity of nonparticipant subjects of empire or trans-national religious, economic or language groups.<sup>22</sup>*

Even though US citizenship is provided by the Covenant, it is incomplete. The document's formal inconsistencies produce dissonance rooted in group interests over and above individual citizens and society as a whole.

### **Property Rights in the CNMI**

The Covenant to establish a US Commonwealth contains provisions which are not only extra-constitutional, but which are in direct conflict with the Constitution in both law and principle. For example, Section 805 of the Agreement places restrictions on the acquisition of land based upon a racial category. The document stipulates that:

*in view of the importance of ownership of land for the culture and traditions of the people of the Northern Mariana Islands... permanent and long-term interests in real property are restricted to persons of Northern Mariana Islands descent.*

In fact, the CNMI Supreme Court decided in the *Ferreira v. Mafnas* case (1992) upholding Article XII of the CNMI Constitution which legally prescribes that only persons of 'Northern Marinas descent' can purchase land in the archipelago.

This local law 'creates two separate and unequal classes of US citizens' in violation of both the 5th Amendment and the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution.<sup>23</sup> While James Madison clearly stated in *Federalist* #10 that the 'protection of the diversity of faculties of men, from which the rights or property originate is the first object of government', Article XII of the CNMI Constitution favours one group (people of Northern Marianas descent) above all others. The US Constitution requires that constituent-state governments equally protect the property rights of all citizens, 'not just the property rights of a select class of people'.<sup>24</sup> Article XII is in this way a legal 'group'-based preference which

precludes equal protection before the law for citizens who do not fit the description of the advantaged group.<sup>25</sup> It 'runs counter to the idea that each person living in a community has equal rights, freedom, and protection' under the Agreement that binds them.<sup>26</sup>

There is little question that the restriction of the possession of property to the indigenous Chamorro people is intended to preserve and protect the local culture. Restricting land ownership 'acknowledges that loss of land results in disruption of a people's sense of identity'.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, such restrictions conflict with the concept of equal rights for all. US citizens who live in the Northern Marianas who are excluded by Article XII are denied the ability to cultivate and preserve their identity. Legislation which legally discriminates in favour of a collective indigenous cultural and ethnic identity in this way violates the principle of equality which is essential to the preservation of justice in a society which is comprised of a variety of sub-cultures which must be viewed equally before the law.

The US federal system addresses ethnicity as a distinct element of numerous elements which are encompassed as parts of a larger societal whole. Ethnic groups in the US typically 'do not have a "homeland" within the borders of the nation', and are 'fairly rapidly assimilated to the national political culture, and the national culture in other respects too', while retaining certain aspects of respective sub-cultures.<sup>28</sup> Neither of these characteristics fully apply in the CNMI. Largely as a result of distance and isolation, the Chamorro people maintain a concentration which constitutes a majority. As well, the Northern Mariana Islands are the homeland of the Chamorro people, which places them in a category similar to that of the Native American Indians. The basic issue concerning property rights is the tension between preserving the identity of the Chamorro people on one hand, while protecting the constitutional rights of non-indigenous US residents on the other. When public policy 'attaches rights in public law to membership in some groups, this reacts back on others'.

### **Labour Rights and Minimum Wage Policy in the CNMI**

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Commonwealth Covenant is Article V which stipulates which provisions of the US Constitution apply. Section 503 states that US immigration and naturalization laws as well as minimum wages are inapplicable and will only apply to the Commonwealth upon the mutual consent of both the CNMI and the United States (Covenant, Article 5).

Local control of immigration and minimum wage legislation has led to very unfortunate circumstances. Reports of civil rights abuses have surfaced, eliciting regional and international expressions of outrage necessitating US Federal inquiries and increased Federal presence and regulation.<sup>29</sup> Repeated reports of 'rape, forced prostitution, coerced confinement and other abuses of alien workers' have brought to the forefront 'fundamental issues of justice and fairness for migrant workers', raising serious questions regarding both US domestic and foreign policy. The vast majority of those who migrate to the Northern Marianas to work are Filipinos (in 1991 alone, the Northern Marianas hired 10,424 workers from the Philippines).<sup>30</sup> Most labour abuse problems arise between Filipino labourers and NMI employers. Persistent allegations of mistreatment of Filipino migrant workers has brought a lawmaker to rate the CNMI as one of 'the most abusive places in the world to work'. And while the majority of abuse cases involve domestic maids, night club workers, and construction labourers, approximately 200 Filipino teachers recently filed suit against the Commonwealth and prevailed, asserting a pattern of racial discrimination with respect to salary levels.<sup>31</sup>

While the Commonwealth Agreement specifically excludes the application of certain aspects of the US Constitution in an effort to preserve the 'culture and traditions' of the indigenous Chamorro people, it fails to provide adequate protection for minorities, both foreign and national.

### **Application of the US Constitution**

Much debate has surrounded issues of federalism, particularly in terms of the extent and limitation of national power in the US Constitutional system. Recent research suggests that what is of primary concern is not power as an end, but its mode of operation. More directly, reference to the writings of

James Madison indicates that the best guide to understanding the political philosophy of the Constitution is to focus on constitutional principles primarily, addressing the distribution of power subsequently. While the Constitution gave supremacy to the 'union' as a cure for the formal defects of the Articles of Confederation (namely that the confederal form of the Articles was excessively State oriented, and, therefore, could not provide a sufficient remedy for the problem of factions);

*far from being a 'nationalist by instinct', Madison was a republican, driven by his frustration with the Articles of Confederation to strengthen the federal government, but only in a manner consistent with his core principles.*<sup>32</sup> (emphasis added)

It can be provisionally assumed that from Madison's perspective, the main purpose of the Constitution was the preservation of liberty, public and private.<sup>33</sup> The institution of the rule of a supreme law (the Constitution), the republican scheme of representation, the separation of powers, and the incorporation of checks and balances (auxiliary precautions) as well as the federal principle were all evidently directed toward this purpose. One of Madison's core principles to be fulfilled by the Constitution is the protection of public and personal liberties and this appears to provide a guide toward comprehending the proper power relations between distinct departments of government in the system.<sup>34</sup>

The contradictory nature of the CNMI Covenant in essence derives from a pragmatic political agreement which emphasises the distribution of power between the two entities at the expense of constitutional principles. By not providing for the clear and full application of the Constitution (or the complete exclusion of it through a compact of free-association), political interest(s) are not appropriately connected with basic constitutional rights.<sup>35</sup> The people of the CNMI do not have proper formal representation at the national or State levels of government (the Commonwealth, not being a state, is not specifically accounted for constitutionally), the republican and federal principles are inoperative and a limitation of both national and local authority is absent. This problem raises a point of critical importance: proper and adequate formal representation limits national power constitutionally.

The exclusion of portions of the US Constitution results in both national and local governments instrumentally and selectively choosing when and if the Constitution (the rule of law) applies. This is a prescription for tyranny (rule of interested will) of all varieties which the Constitution was expressly meant to prevent. Madison's analysis is instructive: Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure. There are but two methods of providing against this evil: by creating a will in the community independent of the majority - that is, of the society itself; or by comprehending in the society so many separate descriptions of citizens as will render an unjust combination of a majority of the whole improbable, if not impracticable.<sup>36</sup> The US Constitution was largely (although not solely) intended to block State (local) encroachments on minorities by creating a will in society generally (a national majority) which would be 'explicitly committed to public and personal liberty' thereby functioning as a check upon factious forces.<sup>37</sup> The operative check against tyrannical national majorities is provided by the extension of territory which creates a multiplicity of distinct interests which are unlikely to converge at the expense of private rights. The Commonwealth Agreement does not effectively provide for the preservation of public and private liberty which the Constitution requires and in this way actually works against the interests of all parties concerned.

The Northern Marianas were ill-advised in seeking Commonwealth Status (Puerto Rico notwithstanding) as its constitutional clarity within the US governmental framework is both practically and theoretically suspect. Moreover, Commonwealth status cannot and never could achieve the objectives of independence or self-government. The NMI would have been on more solid ground in seeking either Freely-Associated State status which would have provided military/strategic and economic support by way of a legally binding and time-bound Compact without citizenship and constitutional application, or Statehood (alone or in combination with Guam, other Pacific entities, or another State), however unlikely, which would have provided all the benefits mentioned above, but with citizenship as well as full constitutional application and appropriate representation. The present

arrangement suggests that the CNMI is neither independent or self-governing - yet, in a certain sense, both. Put differently, the Covenant places the NMI in political association with the US in a way that is meaningful, only to the extent that that meaning refers to contradictory ambiguity. The Commonwealth Agreement is the product of an attempt to pragmatically reconcile conflicting goals through the establishment of a political status which is incapable of creating such a reconciliation.

## Conclusion

The United States is a rather new and developing country, engaged in a social, economic, and political experiment in 'self-government'. One condition which has been indispensable for its growth and success is the extension of the nation's territory. Not only is there strength in numbers combined (union), there is a sufficient check against majoritarian faction which is not well controlled for in smaller republics. Madison noted that 'the larger the society, provided it lie within a practical sphere, the more duly capable it will be of self-government.'<sup>38</sup> He considered an extended republic to be essential for justice and the public good. However, the degree of territorial extension was intended to be qualified and limited to a 'practical sphere'. The obvious question which follows concerns the determination of what that practical sphere of territory is in a constitutional republic. It may be assumed that territorial over-extension could potentially produce an excessive diversity of interests thereby compromising the public good.

In as much as extension of territory must be rooted in constitutional principles and the appropriate application of federalism, Madison stated that 'the practicable sphere may be carried to a very great extent by a judicious modification and mixture of the federal principle'.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of territorial extension is in this way inextricably connected with the purposes of constitutionalism. If the extension of the nation's territory is properly guided by the Constitution, then it is necessary for the Constitution to state how, and upon what specific criteria such extension can and should occur. The Constitution, however, in Article. IV, Section 3, states that 1) 'New States may be admitted by the Congress' into the Union, and 2) 'that the Congress shall have power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States'.<sup>40</sup>

The Constitution certainly provides for the admission of new States to the Union. It also recommends congressional regulation and control of US territory and property. Yet the issue of acquisition or admission of territory is unclear. While the Northwest Ordinance (1787) established a pattern for the acquisition of territory under the Articles of Confederation, the US Constitution remains vague in this regard. Furthermore, even the power the Northwest Ordinance granted the Federal government 'was not conceived as unlimited, as in due course territories were to become States in the Federal union.'<sup>41</sup> Since the Constitution makes a distinction between a territory and a State, can the United States rightfully possess or acquire territory and property which is not in the form of a State?

This lack of constitutional clarity is conceivably the primary source of friction in US territorial relations. Madison, in the *Federalist*, was particularly skeptical of drawing Federal government power too loosely. He was critical of the Continental Congress regarding the acquisition and management of the Western territory of the American mainland:

*Congress have undertaken to do more: they have proceeded to form new States, to erect temporary governments to appoint officers for them, and to prescribe the conditions in which such States shall be admitted into the Confederacy. All this has been done; and done without the least color of constitutional authority.*<sup>42</sup> (emphasis added)

Madison points to the abuses of power by the national government in the extension of territory, which derive from the gulf between the powers expected by the government and those it actually possessed, leading to usurpation and despotism.<sup>43</sup> He conceded that the acquisition of the Western territory was in the public interest but maintained that the danger resulting from a government which does not possess regular powers commensurate to its objects is great.<sup>44</sup>

Where the Constitution is excessively ambiguous, such incertitude can lead to the kinds of tyrannical

activity the institution was intended to prevent. The Territorial Clause (Article IV, Section. 3) is sufficiently vague to invite the extra-constitutional use of Congressional power. The Covenant to establish a Commonwealth is a poignant example of Federal government over-extension. The United States (via the Congress) has erected a government which is not constitutionally provided for. And, while the US has taken the position that as a result of the Covenant, the Territorial Clause applies to the Commonwealth, that clause specifies that only new 'States' can be admitted to the Union, and limits Congressional authority to the control of US territory and property.<sup>45</sup> Having granted US citizenship to the people of the NMI, can it be asserted that the people (individual citizens) of the Commonwealth are US property? Directly, does the Congress possess the constitutional authority to confer US citizenship upon a population which does not reside in a State of the Union? If so, in what sense can the interests of those citizens be connected with the constitutional rights of the place?<sup>46</sup>

When Congress passes a law which is suspected of being unconstitutional, the Supreme Court is obliged to exercise its power of judicial review. The NMI-US Commonwealth Agreement is in need of such review.<sup>47</sup> Should the Covenant be found unconstitutional, it will be the responsibility of Congress to elucidate the wording of the 'territorial clause' by way of amendment. The people of the Northern Marianas will then need to be offered a form of political status which is theoretically and practically congruent with either the US Constitution (through self-government in Statehood), or genuine independence of some kind. This clarification should be based on the understanding that with respect to US territories and citizens in those territories, the Constitution must either apply in full, or not at all.

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10. *Ibid.*
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38. Chadwick, *The Federalist*, 284.
39. *Ibid.*, 284.
40. Constitution of the United States, Article IV, Section 3.
41. Leibowitz, *Defining Status*, 6.

42. Chadwick, *The Federalist*, 201.
43. Read, 'Our Complicated System', 462.
44. Chadwick, *The Federalist*, 201.
45. McKibben, 'The Political Relationship Between the US and Pacific Islands Entities', 292.
46. Chadwick, *The Federalist*, 281.
47. Fallon, 'Federal Policy and US Territories', 41. Note the following provisional alternatives- 1) Amend Article IV, Section 3 of the Constitution by a) stating the specific objectives of Territorial status such as preparation for citizenship and Statehood, b) setting a time period by which movement from Territorial status to Statehood will occur, or 2) develop a specific process for movement to Independence



## **Nauru: Decolonised, Recolonising, but Never a Colony**

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Decolonisation is a specialised term with narrow as well as broader connotations. We can consider seven aspects before we turn to Nauru:

1. Decolonisation is used to refer to the breaking of ties of control by an outside power over an indigenous society. As several contributors to this Workshop have mentioned, that break can be imposed by the colonial power, or demanded and achieved by the people. Nauru is an example of such local demand, but in their case it was to remove United Nations Trusteeship control.
2. Decolonisation implies moves towards autonomy. But it depends on who is viewing that autonomy and from what vantage point. In small island states, autonomy may mean freedom to choose their aid donor, and thus a new form of dependency. That may become Nauru's choice.
3. Taking a World Systems approach with people as active agents interpreting the hegemonic system, decolonisation marks a new political phase. For a small nation that phase is marked by new relations with larger powers, as well as new relations with other small nations, such as the development of ISIS.
4. With decolonisation the status of economic transactions may not change (i.e. the sale of phosphate mined on Nauru), but the political control of those transactions is at stake.
5. Decolonisation frequently brings a new identity. A new cultural system emerges from the remnants of the impact of colonialism. But that need not mean that a totally Western capitalist value system is taken on.
6. For some authors decolonisation refers to a return to a former status, if that is ever possible. Hobsbawm's idea of 'reclaiming the historic past' is an advance on that 'return', but with the colonial past built into the emerging political identity.
7. Decolonisation can be taken as reaction or revolution in the aftermath of an imposed ideology.

Nauru was never colonised, I argue, because the people never submitted to a colonial power. Indeed, they spent the 60 years when they were 'occupied' by outside powers resisting any attempt to colonise them. If we take colonisation as 'the implanting of settlements on distant territories', almost always as a consequence of imperialism,<sup>1</sup> then Nauru was not an outpost for officials from European powers. Indeed even in such a small population Europeans never amounted to more than five per cent.<sup>2</sup>

Rather, I am concerned to show that Nauruans were exposed to a heavy dose of British imperialism, that is 'the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory'.<sup>3</sup> That Britain delegated, or was strongly urged into delegating that 'rule' to Australia, is part of the issue to be clarified. Nauruans spent the time from the Nauruan Agreement in 1919 in which they were not even consulted, asserting their rights to both a greater say in their own affairs, and a greater proportion of the profits from phosphate extracted from their land. Thus decolonisation moves were contemporaneous with the process of British imperialism.

Paradoxically this strong pattern of resistance, particularly to the Australian version of imperialism, is confounded with an acceptance by Nauruans of the ideological principles which stem from British imperialism. They were plunged into a system of capitalism and trade, together with administrative structures that supported those principles through education, health and religion.

Thus I argue that what appears to be a conflict of interests for Nauruans allowed them to assert their own cultural stamp on their history. Their rejection/acceptance paradox can best be viewed through three aspects of their history. First, they used the new ideology and system to build and assert their

political voice for autonomy, and thereby to gain mastery of their own lives, even in the 1920s; they learned this at the behest of their masters. Second, after Independence they needed assistance with their position in the world market economy. 'Half an island and some cash' was not enough to provide for future generations. It follows, third, that they have asserted their strong commitment to their heritage by setting in place a program of Rehabilitation of their island after mining, which is likely to be a useful model for other communities in their post-colonial mining endeavours to be carried out on their own terms.

### Seeking Autonomy

Nauru was never strictly speaking a colony. Germany referred to its position in Nauru (after 1888) and elsewhere as 'protectorates' rather than colonies.<sup>4</sup> When these protectorates were reallocated in 1919, Nauru was one of many societies placed under a League of Nations C class mandate. Britain accepted responsibility for that Mandate, at the insistence of Australia, and delegated the requirement 'to exercise whatever powers it possessed solely for the benefit and advancement of the mandated territories'<sup>5</sup> to Australia.

The Nauru Agreement of 1919 established the terms by which that mandate status would be exercised. It set up the administrative structure, but alongside that, it created a Board of Commissioners appointed by each of the member governments, namely Britain, Australia and New Zealand. They were empowered to hold title to the phosphate deposits, and to sell or supply that phosphate only to themselves. Weeramantry argues that that Agreement violated the terms of the Class C Mandate. Nauruans were not party to that Agreement.

They soon appreciated that they had been left out of ruling their own nation, so they agitated for a greater share in phosphate profits and greater control of their own affairs as early as 1921. This resulted in the formation of a Council of Chiefs in 1927, an Australian idea based on imperial models, but not formerly a part of Nauruan social structure. This Council gradually grew in influence, under the leadership of Timothy Detudamo, and provided a vital channel for Nauruan dissatisfactions with administrative policies and phosphate extraction matters. It became the negotiating body by which Nauruans were able to assert their claims for greater shares of the profits - these rose from two pence in 1922 to seventeen shillings and sixpence in 1966.

The Council of Chiefs was democratised by Nauruans themselves in 1951 when it was replaced by the Nauru Local Government Council. In this move, Nauruans were possibly ahead of their imperial mentors. This new body of elected representatives of the fourteen districts continued as a major channel of representation for dissatisfactions with the system of administration. Some of the major concerns were their inability to influence, or to have a say in the administration of their own people. Housing and health facilities were renovated for the phosphate workers before Nauruan needs were addressed. They were treated as ignorant, poorly educated, lacking in political skills, and thus unfit to govern themselves. Yet Detudamo, and Hamer de Roburt who succeeded him within the NLGC structure in 1956, proved highly significant figures in formulating Nauru's case for independence.

Nauru became a Trust Territory after World War II, with Australia regaining administrative control after Japanese occupation. Still the British Phosphate Commissioners ran the mining operation, expanding the plant, and exporting greater amounts of phosphate to themselves at favourable rates.

The Nauru Local Government Council used the United Nations Visiting Missions which were assigned every five years to assess the status of the Trust Territories around the world. In 1956 Hamer de Roburt raised the matters of Nauruan autonomy, their housing, and their future status once mining was completed, with the Visiting Mission. His papers to that body clarified Nauruan demands for the present and the future. It became clear to Visiting Missions, which were composed of non-western delegates, that Australia was not abiding by the premises of the Trust Territory agreement to look after the welfare of those people entrusted to them. Rather the Mission quickly understood that Australia had a conflict of interest as Administrator, and a mining operator and purchaser of phosphate.

Successive Visiting Missions upheld Nauruans' concerns for autonomy, resulting in Independence in 1968. Nauruans' attempts to gain control of their own affairs including the phosphate mine were achieved. At a price. Nauruan will asserted that political independence include control of the phosphate mine, so that the profits could accrue to the people for their future. BPC, and Australia in particular, were opposed to selling the mine, as they wanted to maintain access to cheap phosphate. But Nauruan will prevailed. They bought the mine for \$21 million. Thus they achieved control, and complete decolonisation.

However, though decolonisation had been achieved, in the sense that Nauruans were now in complete control of their own affairs, yet imperialist ideology (implanted along with mining and mandate administration) lingered. Its influence is still there, as Nauruan wealth is the subject of much speculation by the western media, even more so today. Nauruans are capitalists in the sense that they bought the mine and run it in the form of the Nauru Phosphate Corporation. And they have invested the profits, and suffered in the 1987 crash.

### **Half an Island and some Cash**

The issue of what to do with Nauruans once their island was mined out should have been a concern of both the mining consortium and the administering trustee. It was recognised clearly by Nauruans in the 1930s; and in the 1940s a Rehabilitation Fund was established, but it had only a meagre \$599,325 in 1968. Some twenty years later this Fund stood at \$214 million, according to the Nauru Phosphate Royalties Trust which manages this and several other funds on Nauruans' behalf. Weeramantry argues that the 'meagre sum... demonstrates the indifference of the partner governments to the rehabilitation aspect of their obligations'.<sup>6</sup>

Australian administrators had a fixed idea that they would move Nauruans off their island, and continue to mine the island unfettered. They used the model of the Banabans who had been moved off Ocean Island in 1946 once phosphate was nearing its end, and resettled them on Rabi in the Fiji group. Alternative sites for relocating Nauruans were suggested, and duly considered. Hamer de Roburt led his peoples' representatives to examine carefully and evaluate the potential of islands such as Curtis off the coast of Australia. All such sites were rejected on two grounds. Nauruans would not be autonomous on these islands; they would be sharing the land with Aborigines, and would be tied to Australian citizenship ever after. Second, they would give up their island heritage and all it meant to them, including the phosphate which still had a high export value. Half the island remained to be mined.

Thus Nauruans became adamant that they wanted to remain on Nauru whether or not mining finished. But in order to do so they recognised that their island needed to be made habitable. And that would require outside assistance.

A Commission of Enquiry into the Worked out Phosphate lands of Nauru was established in 1986 by the Government of Nauru, with an Australian international lawyer as chief advisor. Its task was to examine in depth the question of 'the government or organisation who should accept responsibility for rehabilitating the areas of phosphate land worked out in the periods covered by the German administration, the League of Nations Mandate, the Japanese occupation and the United Nations Trust, and The cost and feasibility of any proposed rehabilitation'.<sup>7</sup>

This enquiry raised many concerns relating to the procedures and operations of 'colonisation' of Nauru. The findings, in 16 volumes, established the case that Nauru had not been colonised, that imperialism had been self-serving in the interests of the British Phosphate Commissioners, and that Australia had administered Nauru not within the protocols of a Trust Territory. These findings were summarised by the Chairman of the Commission of Enquiry.<sup>8</sup> As an international lawyer, Weeramantry addressed points of law. He found that 'the natural resources of Nauru were the inviolable heritage of the Nauruan people, [and that] the principle of permanent sovereignty meant that neither title to the phosphate nor the right to exploit it could have been given away by the German government or acquired by the British Phosphate Commissioners in the manner claimed by the BPC and the partner governments on their

behalf'.<sup>9</sup>

Environmental damage was proven, but mitigated by attempts to redress some of the concerns and the finding that there was no deliberate intent to cause continuing and unredressed damage. But the trustee nations were under a duty to hand back the trust territory in at least as good a state as that in which they received it. On these bases a claim for compensation against the former British Phosphate Commissioners was established by the Nauru government in the Australian courts. The case was dismissed by the Australian government, so Nauru government took the case to the International Court of Justice in the Hague, where a case was found to be answered. It was settled out of court by Australia in 1993 with the establishment of a fund of \$121 million for Rehabilitation of those lands mined by BPC before the mine was sold to Nauru in 1970.

Nauruans were faced with the task of turning a sea of untraversable pinnacles into a usable land area. This is a major engineering feat requiring a number of interlocking structural decisions. A joint Nauru/Australia Rehabilitation project was formulated in 1994 with Terms of Reference to provide the Nauru government with several options for restructuring and rebuilding their landscape. The costings were to be feasible in terms of the \$214 million in the Rehabilitation fund, together with the \$121 million settlement by Australia.

The Nauru government insisted on making these recommendations their own, rather than rubber-stamping them. They underwent 15 months of close consideration. Nauruans had learned their lessons at the feet of their imperial masters.

### **Facing the Future**

Nauru faces recolonisation in the sense that the help of engineers and other structural specialists will be needed to reconstruct the landscape. But it is clear that any outside assistance will be received by Nauruans reasserting those ideologies in Nauruan terms.

Repairing the damaged island and restoring it to its usefulness has been formulated under the Nauruan vision of Recreating the Garden of Eden. In the mid-1800s those Europeans who wrote about Nauru described it as a green and lush island, so it is that status that Nauruans dream of recreating after mining finishes. Today that reflection of western ideology has taken on particular Nauruan meanings.

The recommendations of the Nauru/Australia Rehabilitation Commission now lie before a Nauru Rehabilitation Committee. (That Committee was established on paper in 1995, but it could not meet until the nation's financial status became clear.) A new President elected in November 1995 devoted six months to establishing how much money remains in the Nauru Phosphate Royalty trust funds, and how much is available for Rehabilitation. A figure was agreed by Parliament in May 1996, allowing the Committee to hold its first meeting in July 1996 with the then President, Lagumot Harris, in the chair.

Reconstructing an island landscape from a baseline of coral has few precedents. Most mines are situated in an environment where the mine site can be set aside, as people carry on their lives elsewhere. Not so on Nauru, where the task is to create a living environment for both human and other species. But that requires money. How should that money be spent. Do the best imperialist policies offer solutions to the damage they have created?

Advice - some good, some not so good and some mischievous and harmful, has guided Nauruans. Their period of Trusteeship has led them to be highly sceptical of outside advice, yet they have not enough inside expertise to cope with the complex situation.

Decolonisation has left an after-taste for Nauruans, only some of it palatable. Decolonisation has meant reinterpreting imperialist ideology. Nauru has lost its island environment, and thus its people wish to recreate a basis for their future. That basis must be both physical, as well as cultural, and economically viable.

Nauru got rid of its imperial intruders in 1968. But at the same time it chose to, or had no other option than to reevaluate capitalism, the work ethic and other ideologies to suit their own peoples' circumstances. They have asserted their own stamp on the present, taking from those ideologies, and making them peculiarly Nauruan. They wish to do things their own way. They seek advice but then interpret that advice to meet Nauruan thinking.

The financial consequences indicate they are at a cliff edge. They will probably require aid, but deplore the possibility, yet look to Australia and New Zealand for that aid. Nauruans have always been concerned to maintain a distinct identity. They are not as far as we can tell closely related to other populations in the Pacific. These historical features have underlined their uniqueness, of language, matriliney, and their billing as wealthy, plus the court case. Yet Nauru is very small, geographically and demographically. Without their land they cannot return to any former status. They foresee their island as rehabilitated to recapture the Garden of Eden that once was. Such a vision has been a graphic reminder of what the task of Rehabilitation offers for the future.

This small island state is joining its Pacific Island neighbours in seeking to establish new ties world-wide. Its closest ties have been forged to fall a small islands bloc in the central Pacific, consisting of Nauru, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu. The President spoke of the strength of this concept of Small Islands States when he addressed the Barbados conference on the issue.

So decolonisation (in the broad sense) means finding sympathetic helpers. That implies loss of autonomy (which Nauruans guard fiercely) and a possible recolonisation by those who can help return prosperity. To recreate the Garden of Eden is based on imperialist, Christian principles, but its outcome will be peculiarly Nauruan.

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**The Talk and the Timing: reputations and reality,  
and the granting of self-government to Papua New Guinea**

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In Albert Maori Kiki's reminiscences, first published in 1968, he recalled an incident that happened on what he said was his 'first real job' as tea boy in the district office at Kerema. He was instructed that one object was a cup and that it sat on another called a saucer, and he was not to spill tea into the saucer. One day he did, 'and the white officer picked up the tea and threw the boiling hot tea onto my bare chest'.<sup>1</sup> Other personal narratives written on the eve of self-government have stories of slights and humiliations. There is an implication that the world of careless, petty privilege was about to end. In his autobiography Somare says that when he was asked why as a public servant he persisted in his involvement in politics he replied, 'Because there is injustice in this country'.<sup>2</sup>

A generation later Malum Nalu looked back on his childhood of 1971-2, those same years of innocent optimism and white privilege. The son of a school inspector, Nalu went to live with his family at Sohano on Buka Passage. He said that on the aircraft, then run by Ansett and TAA, the 'kids' enjoyed the flight

*as it was service with a smile by the hostesses with plenty to eat (a far cry from Air Niugini today), and the pilots allowed us little ones one-at-a-time into the cockpit... Sohano, of course, was where the expatriate colonials had their homes, and naturally [note that casual 'naturally'] we befriended the little white boys and girls, and the island children .... my sister Alison often spent the weekend at Bonis Plantation with her Australian school friend, whose father ran this property on the northern tip of the now-troubled island. Those were the colonial days, and naturally, efficiency was the word.*

*Public Servants were well-dressed and worked with zeal (unlike today), we had fresh milk and mail delivered to our doorsteps, a tractor picked up rubbish every morning, and there were reliable electricity, telephone, and water services.*

Malum Nalu wrote of treasuring his memories and the family photographs that stimulated his recall of a 'seemingly-utopian childhood'.<sup>3</sup>

In a generation, the popular recall of Australian colonialism has been shifting from the supremacy and slights of *mastas* to nostalgia for days of equality, freedom and efficiency. Both judgments - privileged exploitation and benign efficiency - are now common. Thousands of anecdotes support either assessment, and those selected are determined by what the writer wants to praise, denigrate or justify in the present. In the post-colonial state of Papua New Guinea, particularly among that sixty per cent of the population who have no memory of Australian rule,<sup>4</sup> there may be no common judgment of the colonial past, a marked contrast with those states created out of conflict with the colonial power (such as Indonesia) or whose economic growth as independent states seem to confirm their suppression as colonies (such as Korea).

These variable or absent judgments about the colonial past do not apply to individuals. Somare is consistently praised as the father of the nation. Dianne McInnes in her booklet summarising his life says: 'At a Pangu Pati convention rally in 1971, he said it was his aim to bring Papua New Guinea to Independence. It took him just four years to achieve his aim.'<sup>5</sup> What is often omitted is that Somare's main opponents were other Papua New Guineans. In his autobiography he saw himself going into politics to correct the policies that so often neglected and belittled Papua New Guineans,<sup>6</sup> and in his account of his first term in the House of Assembly he gave many instances where he and other members of Pangu tried to change Australian policies, but he made it clear that when he came to power in 1972

his main task was to persuade other Papua New Guineans to accept Pangu policies. He even concedes: 'I was constantly accused of making a secret deal with the Australians on a date for self-government and imposing this on the people'.<sup>7</sup> He does not dwell on this radical transformation in his relationship with the colonial power: from opponent to ally. But the careless have written as though those who provoked his political consciousness and became his formal opponents from 1968 to 1971 continued to be his opposition to 16 September 1975.

Within Australia there is uncertainty whether the pushing of Papua New Guinea towards nationhood was the act of villain or hero. The judgment depends more on who is being praised or blamed, and less on what was actually done. Soon after Andrew Peacock announced his retirement from parliament in 1994, Don Greenlees in the *Australian* wrote:

*After three decades in federal parliament and two tilts at the prime minister's office, in 1984 and 1990, what memory might Andrew Peacock cherish the most?*

*Papua New Guinean independence.*

*In 1972, as the 33-year-old minister for external territories, Peacock cajoled the McMahon government, his own hidebound department and some reluctant PNG leaders to speed the move to self-government and independence for the former Australian colony.*

*Now facing retirement, Peacock remembers the success of this hectic diplomacy....*

*It is a fundamental part of what Peacock sees as his place in history .... But as a monument to his political career, few people would dispute his claim to it.*

*In PNG, Peacock is a revered figure. He has made 54 visits to the country during his years in politics ....*<sup>8</sup>

Peacock was quoted making the confident statement: 'I know what I did in Papua New Guinea was historic'.<sup>9</sup>

Peter Ryan first went to Papua New Guinea as a young soldier, and he has written a fine reminiscence full of insight and compassion for those Papua New Guineans who fought with him, listened to him sceptically, or sided with the Japanese. He has visited Papua New Guinea frequently since the war, written articles and a book, was general editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Papua New Guinea* published in 1972, and was director of Melbourne University Press when it produced significant Papua New Guinea monographs.<sup>10</sup> In the 1995 Latham Lecture he said,

*That PNG should become independent in 1975 seems to have been largely his [Whitlam's] personal's decision. Unabashed by what happened since, he has been reported as claiming: 'It was I, comrade, who liberated Papua New Guinea.'*

*... There is ground for thinking that the Chief Minister (Michael Somare) implored Whitlam to delay. But independence, willy nilly, was imposed with a paternalism equal to that of any old-style unreconstructed colonialist ....*

*Australians, deeply and bitterly, and for years to come, will go on paying the cost of a frivolous prime minister's unwisdom. So will the oppressed and exploited people of Papua New Guinea.*<sup>11</sup>

Ryan was making a considered statement of assertions he had made as forcefully before.<sup>12</sup>

As in Papua New Guinea, the contradictory Australian judgments exist side by side. But in Australia the judgments are more obviously mutually exclusive: they presume different actors as well as different evaluations of the actions and their consequences. If Whitlam was responsible then Peacock was not; and vice versa. Strangely, no one has wondered why in 1972 when all three held significant positions (Somare was Chief Minister, Peacock Minister for External Territories and Whitlam Leader of the Opposition) they did not abandon their lonely roles and combine forces. Far from coming together, they

are presented as though they did not notice each other.

In this confusion of praise and blame, much can be learnt from going back to the debates of the time, finding out what were the issues being contested, fixing when and where decisions were made, and trying to gauge who had the most influence over policy.

In his account of his thirteen year ministry of Papua New Guinea (published by Peter Ryan) Paul Hasluck said that he 'had always seen quite clearly that the end of all we were doing was self-government and independence for Papua and New Guinea'.<sup>13</sup> But that was not the impression he gave when he was minister. At the end of his time in office the stated aim of the Australian government for both Papua and New Guinea was 'to bring the people as quickly as possible to the stage where they will be able to manage their own affairs and decide their political future as a people'.<sup>14</sup> In 1958 in carefully chosen words Hasluck pointed out that Australia's commitment to the United Nations was for 'self-government or independence', not necessarily independence, and even the progress towards self-government was hedged with qualifications.<sup>15</sup> At another point Hasluck spoke of Papua New Guinea at some time seeking 'a measure of independence' and of there being a future 'interdependence' between Australia and Papua New Guinea. In one of his longest contemplations about Papua New Guinea becoming a seventh state he said:

*I do not think that we can foresee the day when Papua and New Guinea will become a member of the Australian Commonwealth on exactly the same terms and in exactly the same constitutional relation as the six States of the Federation. There is no reason whatsoever why they should not enter into relation with the Commonwealth on terms to be negotiated directly between the Commonwealth and Papua and New Guinea at the time when Papua and New Guinea can speak as one people. By that time I fully anticipate that the Australian Federation will itself have changed considerably.*<sup>16</sup>

Not long before he ceased to be Minister for Territories Hasluck twice answered questions in the House of Representatives on whether Papua New Guinea would become a state. Both times he explained that the politically conscious minority of Papua New Guinea wanted to remain in close association with Australia after self-government, and the most acceptable arrangement to them seemed to be one of statehood. When he answered the second question Hasluck added that statehood would be a matter to be considered by the 'Government and the people of Australia, as well as by the people of Papua and New Guinea' at the time of negotiations.<sup>17</sup> In his memoir published just after Papua New Guinea became independent Hasluck claimed that he thought statehood was 'quite unrealistic'. Perhaps he did, but again that was not what he said at the time. He left open the option of statehood, or some other arrangement with a mutated Commonwealth.

When Charles Barnes became Minister for External Territories in 1963 he continued Hasluck's policy of apparently leaving choices and timing to Papua New Guineans. But in 1966 he was forced into greater precision by the Select Committee on Constitutional Development of the House of Assembly, chaired by John Guise. Barnes had informal talks with the Committee early in 1966 and the Committee came to Canberra in April to find out what 'range of special relationships' were available.<sup>18</sup> Cabinet chose not to set a specific aim, but it decided to discourage any thought of Papua New Guinea joining the Commonwealth on the same terms as the existing states.<sup>19</sup> Although the Australia government's failure to be dogmatic and Barnes' own preference for 'an eventual close association' allowed advocates of the seventh state to retain some hope, a critical decision had been made.<sup>20</sup>

When Barnes reported his talks with the Select Committee to the Australian parliament he continued to refer to 'self-determination', and to assert that any decision on a future association should be left to the government of the time. But he did announce that the two territories of Papua and New Guinea would be treated as constitutional equals.<sup>21</sup> The changed emphases in Australian policy were more obvious when Lord Casey as Governor-General outlined the policy of the new John Gorton government early in 1968: Papua and New Guinea were to become a self-governing country, and while a 'special relationship' might be worked out in the future, the development of Papua and New Guinea as a seventh



state was 'fraught with difficulties'.<sup>22</sup> In several speeches Barnes now began to stress that constitutional change 'could not divorced from economic development' and that economic development was a 'long hard road'.<sup>23</sup>

On 6 July 1970 John Gorton, prime minister of Australia, gave an after dinner speech at Port Moresby's Papua Hotel, the Top Pub. In an image used repeatedly on his tour Gorton said that Papua and New Guinea were on the road to self-government, and now further significant steps were to be taken. The Administrator's Executive Council, the embryonic cabinet made up of officials and a majority of elected members, was given increased powers and it was to have a spokesman in the House of Assembly. In effect this was a move towards responsible government. Nominally more important was handing Ministerial Members in the House of Assembly authority over particular subjects including primary and secondary education, health, tourism, cooperatives, posts and telegraphs, and revenue raised in the Territory. Gorton stated that the Australian government would not exercise its power of veto over these matters. Had those Papua New Guineans who were then Ministerial Members been confident and straining for the chance to their implement own policies, there might have been an immediate rush down the road to self-government.<sup>24</sup> In fact those holding office (Angmai Bilas, 'Roy' Ashton, Matthias ToLiman, Sinake Giregire, Tei Abal, Tore Lokoloko, and Toua Kapena) either favoured a slowing of the rate of change or they lacked the education, policies and political support to push for change. The non-official members of the Administrator's Executive Council elected as their spokesman Tom Leahy who could claim to have nearly a hundred of his relatives in country, but he was born in Australia and was seen to be allied to white settlers and conservative New Guineans.<sup>25</sup> The structure had been altered, but radical changes in the practice of politics and the direction of policies were not expected and did not follow. The announcement stirred few fears and few ambitions. The Prime Minister and Mrs Gorton left the diners at the Papua Hotel for a reception at Government House without much sense that this had been a significant moment in the histories of one nation and a potential nation; but at least the official program did not say - as it did for the airport reception - that they would be met by Mr and Mrs David Ilay in 'Position 1'.<sup>26</sup>

When Australian policy changed again in 1971 it appeared - as it did in 1966 - to be in response to the Select Committee on Constitutional Development of the House of Assembly. The need to inform the Committee of what the Australian government thought desirable and to amend the Papua and New Guinea Act to give legislative reality to the Select Committee's recommendations kept forcing the Australian government to make public, and perhaps to decide, its own preferences.<sup>27</sup> In April 1971 Barnes, now a Minister in William McMahon's government, told the House of Representatives that the Territory was 'to be geared to preparing the country for internal self-government during the life of the next House of Assembly (1972-1976)'.<sup>28</sup> He justified the changes on the grounds that the country should be able to move 'with least possible amount of administrative disruption' to self-government when the House of Assembly chose to do so. Barnes now spoke of 'encouraging progress towards self-government'. He said if after the 1972 elections a 'cohesive group of Ministers emerges, with the backing of the House ...' the Commonwealth would in practice regard this group as constituting a government, and would negotiate with this group for the further step by step handing over of power until there was formal recognition of full internal self-government.<sup>29</sup> Barnes accepted the Select Committee's words that a 'proximate timetable' of change to self-government was now in place.

Later in 1971 when introducing amendments to the Papua New Guinea Act, Barnes confirmed that the Australian government had prepared a 'programme for movement to full self government in the period 1972-1976'. The execution of the changes would take into account opinion in the House of Assembly after the 1972 elections and the 'policies of the political leaders who then emerge'.<sup>30</sup>

By the end of 1971 the Australian government had taken several significant decisions. In the five years after 1966 the choices open to Papua New Guineans had been sharply reduced: Papua and New Guinea would not become a state of Australia, all parts of Papua New Guinea would be treated equally and all

were on the same constitutional track, and real powers over health, education and other departments had been handed to the House of Assembly in 1971. As Barnes said in November 1971, 'the country' was 'practically self-governing'. For the future, Australian government had said that if a 'cohesive group' emerged from the 1972 elections it would be recognised as a 'government', and in any case all the institutional steps would be taken so that the country was ready for full internal self-government. Where in the past the Australian government had said that it waited for Papua New Guineans to tell it what they wanted now it declared that it was 'encouraging' them to be self-governing.<sup>31</sup> The old policy of 'self-determination' had almost disappeared. Papua New Guineans could still determine the timing of self-government. Yet even on the question of when they were told that all the legislative and institutional changes would be made - the only question open was at what time Papua New Guineans would choose to use the powers transferred to them. And there was still in the mind of Barnes, but perhaps not of other members of the government, 'economic and political relationships' to be negotiated between Australia and a self-governing Papua New Guinea. But by the end of 1971 Barnes was joining 'independence or self-government' as if they were indissoluble partners.<sup>32</sup> Gorton had written privately to Barnes telling him to quicken the pace towards independence, and by early 1971 David Hay, Secretary of the Department of External Territories, was advising that the critical issue for Australia was to define its national interests against an independent Papua New Guinea: it was not a matter of working out a particular political relationship with a self-governing Papua New Guinea.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps, then, it is Charles Barnes or John Gorton or William McMahon who should be praised or blamed for the transfer of power to Papua New Guinea.

In February 1972 Andrew Peacock became Minister for External Territories. He was thirty-two years of age, energetic, ambitious and with a capacity to establish easy communication with a variety of people. On the day of his swearing in, he flew to Port Moresby, the first of about twenty-one flights that he made to Papua New Guinea as Minister.<sup>34</sup> He brought a new openness and urgency to political change, but there were no road blocks to clear or major decisions to take. The second House of Assembly had ended its deliberations in November 1971, and the counting of votes for the new House did not begin until March 1972. As it was not clear who was going to have power in the new House until the first divisions were forced on 20 April 1972, Peacock had no elected Papua New Guinean office holders with whom he might confer. It was May before the new Administrator's Executive Council met. Even after Somare's National Coalition government had set its course there were few major decisions for Peacock to take. In August he agreed that there should be Papua New Guinean spokesmen for the police and the army in the House of Assembly, he introduced a minor change to the Papua New Guinea Act to allow Somare to increase his ministry to more than 17,<sup>35</sup> and he made a statement accepting the motion of the House of Assembly on 5 September 1972 that Papua New Guinea should have internal self-government on 1 December 1973 or as soon as possible thereafter.<sup>36</sup> Before self-government, Peacock told the House, the Australian government would further amend the Papua New Guinea Act to invest the Papua New Guinea government with the necessary legal authority. But Peacock lost office with the defeat of the McMahon government in the December elections, and those transfers of power were shepherded through the House by his Labor successor. When Peacock made statements about encouraging self-government, and about welcoming target dates but not imposing them, he brought an urgency and enthusiasm to the task. And in cutting out qualifications about the need for economic and social change, and in assuming a direct transition from self-government to independence, he removed the diversions that had been capturing the debate. But Peacock had not been an initiator of a major change or the manager of a shift in the direction of policy.

By the time that Whitlam came to power at the end of 1972 the timetable for self-government was in place, the target and process had been accepted in both Canberra and Port Moresby, many of the formal legislative steps had been taken, and both Barnes and Peacock had spoken about Papua New Guinea already having de facto self-government. Before he became Prime Minister Whitlam had made several visits to Papua New Guinea, and at Goroka in 1965 he had predicted that Australia might have only another five years in the Territory.<sup>37</sup> In debates on Papua New Guinea in the House of Representatives he did not speak as often as some other Labor members, but his were the most distinctive and dramatic

interventions. In 1966 when Barnes was saying that Australia 'has no desire to press constitutional changes upon the people of the Territory which they do not want',<sup>38</sup> that they were free to remain a Territory for as long as they chose,<sup>39</sup> and that there was a 'range of special relationships' that might one day tie Papua New Guinea to Australia<sup>40</sup> Whitlam began his speech with the direct statement: 'We should aim to make the Papua and New Guinea Act ... the constitution of an independent republic of New Guinea within, we hope, the Commonwealth of Nations'.<sup>41</sup> Later he denounced the 1968 changes to the Papua and New Guinea Act as carrying 'gradualism to the point of imperceptibility' and he countered arguments that economic development must precede political change and that only a minority of Papua New Guineans favoured independence:

*The Minister will protest, as he always does when the question of independence for New Guinea is raised, that the inhabitants of the Territory should decide for themselves, that they fear independence. The Minister's exploitation of a reluctance which he himself and his immediate predecessors have fostered sedulously is a tactic which reflects little credit upon him. We must try to overcome this reluctance. It is devious and dishonest to try to hold New Guineans responsible for developmental shortcomings which in fact are our own.*<sup>42</sup>

Whitlam was almost alone in the House in talking of independence rather than self-determination or self-government, and he was almost alone in saying that Australia should set independence as the end of policy before the majority of Papua New Guineans had asked for it. Other members of the Labor Party who visited Papua New Guinea and were sympathetic to the aspirations of Papua New Guineans, such as Kim Beazley and Gordon Bryant, were in fact closer to Barnes than they were to Whitlam.

When Whitlam went to Papua New Guinea in December-January of 1969-70 and January 1971 some people were outraged by his comments, but it is unclear whether they were taken by surprise or they enjoyed savouring an outrage that they fully expected.<sup>43</sup> In a statement issued in Port Moresby on 12 January 1970 Whitlam said that 'The fact of independence is not negotiable'. Even on the question of the timing of independence there was little 'negotiability'. The Australian government's obligations to the United Nations, to protect its reputation and relations with other nations, and to act in the best interests of the people of Australia meant that independence was a decision for Australia:

*Therefore it is either misleading or meaningless to assert that the decision for independence is one for the people of New Guinea alone. The form of independence is certainly for them to decide for themselves. The fact of independence has already been decided.*<sup>44</sup>

The real problems of Papua New Guinea such as the economy, the fragmentation, and lack of education, were, he said, not unique to Papua New Guinea: they were more likely to be debated and solved by Papua New Guineans than colonial rule. What was unique to Papua New Guinea was that 'alone among significant populations its people make no final decisions on any matter affecting their welfare'. If Labor won the election at the end of 1972 then Papua New Guinea, Whitlam announced, would be given 'home rule' as soon as the arrangements could be made. By home rule he meant that Papua New Guineans would control everything except foreign affairs and defence.

Whitlam's speech was in sharp contrast with the sorts of speeches so normally made by eminent Australians in Papua New Guinea. Billy Hughes, Robert Menzies, Paul Hasluck and Charles Barnes had used variations on the assurance: 'So long as you need our help you can depend on us to give it. So long as you want us to stay you can depend upon us not to desert you'.<sup>45</sup> But the speech and the political program it outlined was not in sharp contrast with the thinking of many in the Australian cabinet and the administration.<sup>46</sup> The effect of Whitlam's speeches was to focus attention on Papua New Guinea, provoke Gorton to act according to his own perception of events rather than tolerate the gradualism of Barnes, and provide the Australian government with the threat that preparations for self-government had to be made or the Labor Party would thrust power on the unready. The changes announced by Gorton in Port Moresby in July, confirmed by Barnes at the end of 1970, and extended by him in 1971 enabled the Liberal-Country Party Government to do most of what Whitlam had advocated, earlier than he had wanted, while denouncing his insensitive extravagance and claiming to

act at the pace set by the House of Assembly.

When Peacock announced on 10 October 1972 that the changes for self-government would be in place by 1 December 1973, Whitlam responded:

*I take this immediate opportunity to say that the Labor Party supports and endorses the statement made by the Minister .... I would like to express also what I believe is a general view that the Minister has done our country a service in the comradeship and co-operation which he has achieved with the Government of Papua New Guinea.*

By October 1972 the Government and Opposition had returned to the bipartisan policy that had marked nearly all of Australian rule in Papua New Guinea. The flurry from late 1969 had been brief and rhetorical rather than a significant division. Whitlam and Peacock may not be recognised as allies by history, but they knew they were in 1972.

In the debates in the House of Assembly leading to Barnes saying that he would recognise a coherent group as a virtual government, few Papua New Guineans spoke about the form that their new government should take or what policies it should pursue. The talk remained fixed on whether all parts of Papua New Guinea would have the same future, and when Papua New Guinea should have self-government. The Papuans were most persistent in probing for some hint that they might be able to preserve a separate status. Papuan leaders in Australia interrogated officials and when Australian politicians visited Papua they were often asked if Papuans had any rights to enter Australia, or whether they could apply for Australian citizenship.<sup>47</sup> Bert Counsel, an Australian representing the vast Papuan regional electorate of Western and Gulf, persuaded the House to request the Australian government not to alter the status of Papua without the approval of the Papuan people. Momei Pangial, member for Mendi in the Southern Highlands, proposed a motion that the Commonwealth government visit Papua 'to learn of their concern at first hand'. The House passed the motion, for members were strangely sympathetic to the aspirations of those who would damage the unity of the state that was soon to be created. But the Commonwealth declined to send a special delegation to talk to Papuans.<sup>48</sup> The determination of the Papuans to stress their separateness was so strong, it is no wonder that it has continued to influence people's perceptions of their identities and interests after independence.

The calls for slowing the pace were often made by those who wanted to emphasise how close they were to uncontacted village life. Andagari Wabiria from Koroba in the Southern Highlands admitted that he deliberately appeared before the Select Committee wearing tapa cloth and brandishing a spear. He went on to tell the House that his people wanted schools and cash crops, they needed Australians to stay in the country to help them, he had been told that people in other newly independent countries were having trouble, and he simply wanted all the talk of self-government and independence to stop.

When the 1972 House of Assembly first met, many members still had the same regional and conservative concerns. In the House's early role in the making of the nation of Papua New Guinea Michael Somare was central in three significant events. First, he put together a coalition government when it was known that he campaigned on a policy of immediate home-rule. This was believed to have minority support in the electorates, and Somare and his Pangu supporters had consistently suffered crushing defeats in the old House. Towards the end of 1972 Les Johnson wrote to the Minister: 'the Coalition could not hold together for any length of time with any other leader'.<sup>49</sup> Second, he introduced the motion in June requesting that the changes necessary for internal self-government be in place by 1 December 1973 or as soon as possible thereafter. He argued his case effectively and vigorously, and the motion was accepted in September 1972. Within the range of times available, Somare had helped determine the timing of the formal declaration of self-government. Third, he introduced the motion to set up the Constitutional Planning Committee. The terms of reference said that this was to be the constitution for a 'united Papua New Guinea' and it was to be written 'with a view to eventual independence'. In those three actions in 1972 a Papua New Guinea government was formed with the capacity and will to use the powers transferred to it, the date for full internal self-government was fixed, and the transition of a united Papua New Guinea to independence had been affirmed. There would be

no 'range of special relationships' - just negotiations between two independent nations.

Gough Whitlam became Prime Minister at the end of 1972 after all these decisions had been taken. It was the task of Somare, Whitlam, and his Minister for External Territories, William Morrison, to keep to the established timetable. That was not easy, but from late 1972 they were taking no new radical decisions. When Morrison made a statement on the constitutional development of Papua New Guinea in May 1973 he 'reaffirmed the agreement reached by the previous government with the Papua New Guinea Government on the timing of self-government'.<sup>50</sup> Peacock began his response with the statement:

*Both the content of the speech by the Minister for External Territories (Mr Morrison) and the material contained in the instruments tabled in the Parliamentary Library by the Minister are substantially material agreed to by the previous government.*<sup>51</sup>

Later, in August Morrison introduced the 'historic' legislation to provide formal self-government,<sup>52</sup> and Peacock again followed with the claim:

*We are, in fact, enacting decisions which were, in the main, taken by the Government of Papua New Guinea in conjunction with the previous Liberal-Country Party Government.*<sup>53</sup>

On the timing of self-government Australians were as publicly bipartisan as they had been on policies in the 1930s and 1950s.

Government and opposition were not, however, as one on independence. As Minister, Peacock had spoken of Papua New Guinea 'moving rapidly to self-government and independence', but he had given no specific date for independence.<sup>54</sup> On taking office the Labor Government was more precise: it said that 'in the closest consultation' with Papua New Guinea independence would be secured within the life of the current parliament.<sup>55</sup> Early in 1973 Morrison thought 'Independence will flow on from self-government' and would take place in 1974.<sup>56</sup> Peacock argued that the date should be primarily be a matter for Papua New Guinea, and other members of the opposition said more strongly that the government was 'wrong to force the pace'.<sup>57</sup> They even claimed that the Australian government was likely to make a unilateral declaration of independence - cutting loose an unready and unwilling Papua New Guinea.<sup>58</sup> Although early in 1974 Somare announced that Papua New Guinea should become independent on 1 December, he was also keen to assert that the date should be decided by Papua New Guinea, but the House of Assembly, the accepted voice of Papua New Guinea, was not easy to persuade.<sup>59</sup> Both Somare and Morrison accepted the qualification that independence would not take place until Papua New Guinea's 'home grown' constitution was debated and in place. That helped Somare placate some of the most cautious conservatives and confident nationalists. In the event it was the determination of the members of the Constitutional Planning Committee to complete their long and detailed document that forced delay.<sup>60</sup> After accepting successive postponements, Somare in June 1975 introduced the motion setting 16 September as independence day. It was passed quickly and easily.<sup>61</sup>

While the course of events was being determined in Papua New Guinea the differences between government and opposition declined. In the House of Representatives Morrison presented an unacknowledged quote:

*The self governing period is a difficult one for both Papua New Guinea and Australia. While Australia understandably wishes to end its responsibility for a people now finding their own future in their own way the Papua New Guinea Government is equally keen to finish with the frustrations of a self governing period and stand as an identity in its own right in world affairs.*<sup>62</sup>

Peacock interjected, 'Those are my words'. They were not; they were Somare's. But the interjection had demonstrated the extent to which Somare, Peacock and Morrison by then favoured the same policy and even the same choice of words.

When the Australians debated the final changes to the Papua New Guinea bill in August 1975 speakers

were more concerned with history than with the immediate legislation before the house, or even with the fact that this was the culmination of Australian responsibility for the administration of two territories. Whitlam referred to the pledges that he had given on behalf of the Labor Party and the Australian people five and six years earlier.<sup>63</sup> Morrison recalled the policies of Eddie Ward in the immediate postwar, and skipped over the intervening thirty years.<sup>64</sup> But Peacock said that the 'reality' was that 'the really effective steps towards self government and independence were taken in 1970'.<sup>65</sup> He went on to praise Gorton and Barnes before making a claim for his own contribution. In his speeches, he said, he had 'constantly reiterated the positive goal of independence', and he had taken part in the first 'government to government' talks on the transfer of powers. Like Whitlam, he obtained the indulgence of the House to incorporate into Hansard a speech that he made in 1972 on future relations between Australia and Papua New Guinea.<sup>66</sup> As the Australians came together again at the end, they divided on history.

In apportioning praise and blame, I have kept to the politicians and to public statements of policy. Inevitably this has in part ignored the contributions of public servants such as Les Johnson and David Hay. But if the focus is limited in this way then the major public decisions were made by Gorton and Barnes. Whitlam was certainly influential, but it was as leader of the opposition when his intervention helped provoke Gorton to act, and provided him with arguments to persuade his reluctant colleagues and conservative Papua New Guineans. Peacock was effective at implementing the new program announced by Gorton and Barnes. In Papua New Guinea Somare was able to form a coherent group with the confidence of the house, convince cautious members that they could and should be self-governing in less than eighteen months, and that the next step should be taken quickly and it would take them to complete independence. Whitlam has been blamed for things he did not do, Peacock praised for determining what in fact he briefly managed, Somare has been praised for dragging reluctant Australians to independence when he was sometimes trailing their plans, but he was certainly important in leading Papua New Guineans to self-government and independence.

In crude summary: Whitlam said first and often that it should be done, he wanted to do it, he gave a justification to others who wanted to do it, he was there when it was done, but he did not do it. Peacock was enthusiastic and efficient about it, and he directed a critical part of it, but he did not do it either. Barnes did not want to do it, he did not want anyone else to do it, but he announced the policy that made sure it would happen. Gorton may not have thought much about it, but when it came to his attention he said to get on with it, and took several decisions that were important in making sure it did happen. Michael Somare wanted it, he persuaded some other Papua New Guineans to want it or to let it happen, he helped decide when it would happen, and that once started it would be complete.

1. Albert Maori Kiki, *Kiki: Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*, Melbourne, 1968, 62-3.
2. Michael Somare, *Sana an Autobiography of Michael Somare*, Port Moresby, 1975, 44.
3. *Post-Courier* 1 Nov 1996.
4. At the 1990 census 2.2 million were under 25 from a total population of 3.6 million.
5. Dianne McInnes, *Michael Somare and East Sepik Province*, Port Moresby, 1975, 7.
6. 'Papua New Guinea' (without the 'and') did not come into existence until 1971, but 'Papua New Guinea' and 'Papua New Guinean' are convenient terms and are here sometimes used anachronistically.
7. Somare, *Sana*, 100.
8. *Australian*, 16 September 1994. He has now made more. Barbara Hooks, Green Guide, *Age*, 12 December 1996, says that Andrew Peacock was in Papua New Guinea this year. Peacock, she says, 'as Minister of External Territories was instrumental in helping PNG achieve self-determination 20 years ago'.

9. Peacock gave one exception to his assertion that all his best political work had been done as Minister for External Territories: his leadership of the Liberal Party to a close defeat in 1984.
10. Peter Ryan, *Fear Drive My Feet*, Melbourne University Press, 1959; *Black Bonanza: A Landslide of Gold*, Melbourne, 1991.
11. Peter Ryan, 'Some Unfinished Business from the Second World War', *Quadrant*, September 1995, 14.
12. eg *The Weekend Australian*, 6-7 November 1993.
13. Paul Hasluck, *A Time for Building: Australian Administration in Papua and New Guinea 1951-1963*, Melbourne University Press, 1976, 239.
14. For example in the *Annual Report* for New Guinea 1961-2, 24.
15. Paul Hasluck, 'Present Tasks and Policies' in John Wilkes ed, *New Guinea and Australia*, Sydney, 1958, 79-80.
16. *Ibid.*, 86.
17. Australian Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, 8 and 13 March 1962, 609 and 717. I gratefully acknowledge the work of Anthea Bundock who photocopied much of the relevant material.
18. House of Representatives, 31 March 1966, 805-6.
19. Ian Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship Papua New Guinea 1945-75*, Canberra, 1980, 368-76.
20. See Peter Hastings' editorial comment in *New Guinea*, Vol 1 No 6, 1966, 10-1.
21. House of Representatives, 21 April 1966, 1087.
22. House of Representatives, 12 March 1968, 9.
23. House of Representatives, 2 May 1968, 1059.
24. It may also be true that the Australian government would not have conceded the powers had it known they were to be exploited in unpredictable or what were thought contrary ways.
25. He claimed nearly 100 relatives in Papua New Guinea, House of Assembly, 12 September 1968.
26. The program was released as a booklet: *Programme for the visit of the Prime Minister of Australia* ...., Port Moresby, 1970. I wrote an article on Gorton's visit for *Nation*, 25 July 1970.
27. The Select Committee was not so much forcing the pace as asking what was possible or acceptable.
28. House of Representatives, 27 April 1971, 2049.
29. House of Representatives, 27 April 1971, 2050-1.
30. House of Representatives, 4 November 1971, 3033.
31. House of Representatives, 227 April 1971, 2050.
32. House of Representatives, 2 December 1971, 4081.
33. L. Johnson, *Colonial Sunset: Australia and Papua New Guinea 1970-74*, Brisbane, 1983, 56 and 99.
34. Peacock, 1995, 3.
35. House of Representatives, 16 August 1972, 241.
36. House of Representatives, 10 October 1972, 2297.

37. Downs, *Australian Trusteeship*, 460.
38. House of Representatives, 31 March 1966, 805, and repeated on 20 October 1966, 2002.
39. House of Representatives, 26 October 1967, 2311.
40. House of Representatives, 31 March 1966, 805.
41. House of Representatives, 27 October 1966, 2284.
42. House of Representatives, 9 May 1968, 1302.
43. His visit of January 1971 was his seventh since election. (House of Representatives, 10 October 1972, 2297.)
44. Whitlam had the statement included in House Of Representatives, 10 October 1972, 2298-300.
45. Paul Hasluck, quoted by the Australian representative, Dudley McCarthy, at the Trusteeship Council, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, August 1962, 13.
46. Johnson, *Colonial Sunset*, 53.
47. For example, they put such questions to Gorton in Port Moresby on 6 July 1970.
48. House of Assembly Debates, 9 September 1971, 4703.
49. Johnson, *Colonial Sunset*, 158.
50. House of Representatives, 3 May 1973, 1669.
51. House of Representatives, 3 May 1973, 1671.
52. House of Representatives, 23 August 1973, 340.
53. House of Representatives, 19 September 1973, 1295.
54. Address to NSW branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 8 June 1972, reprinted House of Representatives, 28 August 1975, 732-4.
55. Governor-General's speech, House of Representatives, 27 February 1973, 12.
56. House of Representatives, 15 March 1973, 672.
57. House of Representatives, 3 May 1973, 1671-2.
58. Philip Lynch, House of Representatives, 28 March 1973, 842-3.
59. Somare, *Sana*, 103. Morrison, House of Representatives, 14 March 1974, 428.
60. Morrison, House of Representatives, 13 November 1974, 3436 spoke of the CPC being 'occupied - some would say preoccupied' with its report, and of his reluctance to intervene.
61. Somare, *Sana*, 143.
62. House of Representatives, 3 December 1974, 4451.
63. House of Representatives, 20 August 1975, 298.
64. House of Representatives, 28 August 1975, 735.
65. House of Representatives, 28 August 1975, 729.
66. House of Representatives, 28 August 1975, 732-4.



**Nugget, Pike, et al. The Role of the Reserve Bank of Australia  
in Papua New Guinea's Decolonisation**

**R.J. May (Political and Social Change, ANU)**

Much of the literature on decolonisation suffers from a tendency to portray the colonial power as monolithic and its motives as simple. This propensity tends to vary directly with commentators' distance from the process. Increasingly, I read references to decolonisation in Papua New Guinea which describe events that, as someone involved, I have difficulty recognising. (From 1957 to 1972 I was employed by the Commonwealth - Reserve Bank, in the Research Department and from 1970 as senior economist in the PNG Department. In 1972 I left the Bank to become field director of the ANU's New Guinea Research Unit but was appointed to the board of the Bank of PNG in 1973.) In virtually all decolonisations different actors hold a range of positions, from opposing independence to being in its vanguard. There were Papua New Guineans who resisted the transition, as well as those who promoted it, and colonial officials who sought to hasten it, as well as those who sought delay: among both were people whose position changed.

This paper recalls one aspect of PNG's decolonisation: the transfer of control over the banking and monetary system. It focuses on the role of the Reserve Bank of Australia. The Bank's interest in PNG began early, on the initiative of its governor from 1949 to 1968, Dr H.C. ('Nugget') Coombs - a man in the vanguard of much that has been good in Australian life. Coombs recruited Dr P.W.E. Curtin to carry forward the Bank's work in PNG; and the Bank's PNG Department, under Curtin and M.J. Phillips, pursued a strategy which sometimes met resistance from the Australian government, the Administration and even the Bank itself.

### **In the beginning**

Coombs records that during the Second World War the Department of Post-War Reconstruction (of which he became director-general in 1943) gave thought to issues of regional planning, including plans for the development of PNG.

*As Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction I had been involved in the planning of the transition in Papua-New Guinea from military Government to civil administration, and in the measures to rehabilitate those residents of the Territories adversely affected by the war and to promote the economic and social reconstruction generally.*

*By 1946 these gave primary emphasis to the development and welfare of the indigenous inhabitants<sup>1</sup>*

This 'primary emphasis' was expressed in 1945 by External Territories Minister Eddie Ward:

*This government is not satisfied that sufficient interest had been taken in the Territories prior to the Japanese invasion, or that adequate funds had been provided for their development and the advancement of the native inhabitants ....*

*In future the basis for the economy of the territory will be native and European industry with the limit of non-native expansion determined by the welfare of the natives generally<sup>2</sup>*

I do not know what influence Coombs may have had on this statement, but there is certainly some coincidence in the views recorded by Coombs and Ward.<sup>3</sup>

In 1949 Coombs became governor of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia<sup>4</sup> and 'brought to the banking

problems of the Territories some familiarity with their economic and social contexts'. At that time, PNG was an extension of the Australian banking system; initially two commercial banks operated there: the Commonwealth Banking Corporation and the Bank of New South Wales; in the 1950s they were joined by the Australian and New Zealand Bank and the National Bank of Australasia. All four were overwhelmingly directed towards the 'expatriate' sector and the Administration, though the Commonwealth Savings Bank made early efforts to mobilise savings.<sup>5</sup> Any attempt to extend banking would have been hampered by the *Transactions With Natives Ordinance*, which (until 1963) rendered transactions in excess of \$100 'unlawful and void as against a native'. Monetary policy also applied uniformly across PNG and Australia.

In 1953 a New Guinea Committee was set up within the Commonwealth Bank. It was to ensure that funds deposited in 'New Guinea' were 'reasonably employed' in the interests of 'New Guinea itself'; to consider what action the Bank could take to promote village cooperatives; and to oversee long-term educational and training to enable 'natives' to participate in the Banks' administration. The same year a working committee of ANU (Spate, Belshaw and Swan) was commissioned 'to investigate the economic structure of the Territory with a view to suggesting gaps in knowledge which it is most essential to fill and lines of advance which hold most prospect of producing positive results'.<sup>6</sup> Again, I do not know whether Coombs played a part in initiating this study (his relations with ANU were close) but an economist from the Bank (Don McKenna) was attached to the working committee in Canberra for several months, acting as general liaison officer between the committee and the Department of Territories and doing much of the committee's statistical work - and (presumably) keeping Coombs informed. Although the working committee suggested that it had 'found little to say which has not been said before', its report provided an important critique of past policies and its discussion of future prospects and proposals for a 'native-oriented polity' and 'native-based production' anticipated many later developments.<sup>7</sup> Coombs recalls that the report 'criticized all the banks for the failure to support New Guinea development, particularly the native agriculture upon which they believed the development should be based'<sup>8</sup> and says that following the report '... the Commonwealth Bank carried out studies of the native economy to test how far the existing state of knowledge and experience of the money economy provided scope for lending', and that a 'modest beginning' was made to employ and train indigenous staff.<sup>9</sup>

In 1959 the Bank commissioned a study of 'the use of money and the need for credit by the indigenous people', to inform its efforts at developing a financial system appropriate to changing economic and social conditions. The study, carried out by J.R. Thomas, an economist with the Bank, and Sydney University anthropologist Dawn Ryan,<sup>10</sup> made a number of recommendations for financial education and development, including the recommendation that the Bank consider the establishment of credit unions.

In the same year, the central banking functions of the Commonwealth Bank were transferred to the new Reserve Bank, which began operations in 1960. In August the Bank opened a branch in Port Moresby. Its first report (*Reserve Bank of Australia, Report and Financial Statements*) [hereafter *RBA Report*] 1960) noted that the central bank 'has for some years taken a special interest' in PNG and that a Port Moresby branch 'will enable it to carry out its central banking functions in the Territory and to keep informed of problems that face banks in this changing environment'.

## **The Reserve Bank in PNG**

### *The Bank's role in financial and economic policy making*

Initially, the Bank's central banking functions were largely confined to acting as banker to the Commonwealth government and the Administration, distributing notes and coin, assisting the Department of Territories and the Administration with loan raising, and maintaining a stock registry; but as political and economic development accelerated, the Bank's role increased. The 1964 report stated:

*In addition [to providing 'the normal range of central banking services'], research activities in relation to the economic and financial development of the Territory have been expanded and, in association with the Administration and the trading banks, the Bank has been actively engaged in encouraging the development of a financial and banking structure suited to the particular needs of the Territory.*

In November 1958 Coombs appointed, as senior research economist (international affairs) in the Bank's Research Department, Dr P.W.E. ('Pike') Curtin. Curtin, a fellow Western Australian, had worked with Coombs in Post-War Reconstruction and had been director of the Colombo Plan Bureau in Sri Lanka, and chairman of the Commonwealth Public Service Board. He was an unorthodox economist of Fabian persuasion. Curtin provided the nucleus of what in 1965 became the Bank's PNG Division.

Towards the end of 1960 a meeting of the Bank's internal Central Banking Advisory Committee (CBAC) considered a paper on the Bank's activities in relation to PNG, drafted by Curtin. On the basis of this, CBAC concluded that the Bank should explore the scope for possible action through: education and training of natives in finance and commerce; employment and training of native staff; financing of promising developmental projects; and collection and publication of basic statistical and economic data. It was also resolved to liaise with CSIRO and other relevant research teams and to continue financing research projects through the Rural Credits Development Fund.<sup>11</sup> Responsibility for planning of studies and courses of action was given to a CBAC subcommittee, the TPNG Committee, headed by one of the Bank's advisers, A.W. Elvery; the work was to be done primarily within the Bank's Research Department, including that Department's Rural Liaison Service, under Curtin.

Shortly afterwards Curtin visited PNG, accompanied by John Phillips<sup>12</sup> from the Bank's Rural Liaison Service and Eric Fleming from the Bank's Bonds and Stock Administration. On their return, a further paper was presented to CBAC, which recommended that credit unions be established; that a meeting of banks and the Department of Territories plan joint advertising and promotion of savings ('thrift'); that a liaison officer be appointed for PNG; and that the Bank make clear its feeling 'that there should be a forward move in lending to indigenes.' On the last point, CBAC thought it likely

*to be some time before the volume of native borrowing would warrant consideration of a separate advance or credit policy for the Territory .... However, as we are asking the banks to make special efforts in the Territory, the Committee feels that it should consider what would be involved in having policies differing from those required in Australia.*

It proposed a meeting with banks, at which

*... we should tactfully suggest means of adapting the structure, staffing and policies ... to meet the growing requirements of the indigenous people .... It is important that the banks be persuaded that T.P.N.G. should be regarded as a separate entity rather than merely as an extension of Australia.*

A meeting was held with the banks early in 1961, but achieved little.

Subsequently, the Bank announced a program of education in money, savings, banking and credit for Papua New Guineans, to be carried out in collaboration with the Department of Territories, the Administration and the banks in PNG, and Phillips was posted to Port Moresby, with the designation 'special duties, monetary development'. In 1962 Phillips's staff was increased and he was joined by a Papua New Guinean, Robin Kumaina, seconded from the Administration.<sup>13</sup> By then a booklet entitled *Your Money*, in English, Tokpisin and 'Police Motu', had been distributed and other publications were in preparation. (By 1966 100,000 copies of the English version of *Your Money* were in circulation.) The Bank's Port Moresby staff steadily grew in the early 1960s, with an increasing proportion of Papua New Guinean staff, and in 1964

work began on a new building (in the early 1970s the Reserve Bank building dominated the downtown Port Moresby landscape). By the early 1960s the Reserve Bank had thus established a significant presence and initiated localisation, had begun financial education, and was becoming increasingly involved in research into and monitoring the economy.

In 1963 the Australian government requested the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to survey the PNG economy. The controversial 'World Bank Report' was presented the following year. Apart from observing that bank lending to indigenous borrowers was small and that 'Indigenous employment in banking, apart from the lowest levels is virtually non-existent', and advising that a separate monetary system would not be advantageous, the Mission had little to say about money and banking.<sup>14</sup> Its main recommendation was that, to mobilise credit to finance its economic development proposals, a Development Finance Company should be established. (This was later done, in the form of the PNG Development Bank, and a Reserve Bank officer, John Beach, was seconded as deputy managing director.)

Curtin provided one of the first public commentaries on the World Bank Report - concluding, cryptically, that 'no one with a sense of colonial realities can do other than agree, in the main, with the commendations of this World Bank Mission'<sup>15</sup> - and the Council on New Guinea Affairs, of which Curtin was a board member and sometime secretary, and to which the Reserve Bank provided funding, organised two seminars (in Melbourne and Goroka) to discuss it. At the Goroka seminar, attended by Gough Whitlam, Coombs presented a paper. In it, he endorsed the assumption 'that it is the Australian Government's intention ... to try to keep ahead of the demands of the local people' in the transfer of political power, and expressed dissatisfaction with the World Bank Report's 'lack of precision in dealing with the task of stimulating indigenous enterprise', before going on to outline the work of the Reserve Bank in creating, developing and guiding an emerging financial system.<sup>16</sup>

In 1965, in accordance with a recommendation of the World Bank Report, the Australian government created the position of Economic Advisor to the PNG Administration,<sup>17</sup> and an Australian economist then with the Prime Minister's Department, Bill McCasker, was posted to Port Moresby. In 1967 and 1968 McCasker's office produced two important documents, *Economic Development of Papua and New Guinea* and *Programmes and Policies for the Economic Development of PNG*, as a basis for future economic policy direction. They broadly followed the strategy proposed in the World Bank report, concentrating on areas of high economic potential and assuming a continuing major role for expatriate enterprise. The documents provoked a lively debate, notably in successive issues of *New Guinea*. One of the first critiques came from Curtin, who argued that by adopting general economic development - as opposed to the development of the indigenous people and their economy - as the overriding policy objective,

*We are in danger of building an economy to which New Guinea society will be unable to adapt itself, and which the New Guinea statesmen of the future will be unable to control*<sup>18</sup>

In April 1964, at Coombs's request, a 'Plan of Work for TPNG' was prepared, considering the activities the Bank was likely to become involved with 'over the next few years' (the assumption was that the Territory would move towards self-government in this period), and appropriate administrative structures within the Bank. Among subjects addressed in this workplan and a series of CBAC memoranda were separate currency; possible expansion of the Bank's role as adviser to the Administration (which was seen as likely to 'necessitate a major expansion in our research activities' in Port Moresby and Sydney); and a separate monetary policy for PNG. Consideration of the last of these culminated in a policy decision in 1966 that bank lending in PNG should no longer be subject to the Bank's general lending policies, but should take account of needs and conditions in the Territory,<sup>19</sup> but without amendment to the Australian *Banking Act*.

Administratively, the position of 'manager' for PNG had been created in 1963 (i.e. Curtin's title changed)

and the next year responsibility for the TPNG Committee shifted from an adviser to the manager of Research Department; in 1965 the PNG Division came into being, and the Bank's operations became the responsibility of the Division. Also in 1963 a graduate research officer was appointed to the Port Moresby office.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, as a result of a proposal first made within the Bank in 1964, in 1966 an Advisory Committee on Central Banking (ACCENT) was established for PNG. The advisory committee, which met two or three times a year to confer and advise on local banking and finance matters, comprised a senior Bank official from Sydney (the governor or his delegate), a representative of the Territory Treasury and nine permanent residents (initially five of whom were Papua New Guineans); it was serviced by the Bank's research staff in Sydney and Port Moresby. The separation of lending policy and the creation of ACCENT were substantial moves towards a separate central bank.

With a view to furthering its central banking role as banker to the Administration, in 1965 the Bank also considered acquiring a small portfolio of Administration securities (it was proposed to subscribe \$250,000 to the loan program in 1966/67). A proposal went to the Bank's board for approval, but was opposed by Treasury in view of existing 'Commonwealth Government/Papua and New Guinea Administration financial arrangements'; the board decided against the move. Five years later External Territories suggested to Treasury that the Bank give 'more positive' support to the PNG loan program, following undersubscription of a loan to finance the first instalment of PNG's equity in the Bougainville mine. (The Bank had provided short-term funding of \$12.5 million.) Treasury remained reluctant but the Bank provided capital funding to the PNG Development Bank and later acquired a small PNG security portfolio.

From the mid 1960s the Bank's work on and in PNG intensified. The Port Moresby office was given greater responsibility, and for the most part operated through the PNG Division rather than dealing with individual departments in the Bank. The Division reported half-yearly to the CBAC and annually to the Bank's board. From 1966-67 separate shadow accounts were kept for PNG operations (this had been proposed as early as 1963) and a TPNG Service staff classification system was introduced. From 1969 Savings and Loan Registry operations were separated from those of the Bank. Research activities were coordinated between Sydney and Port Moresby. In 1970 the PNG Division was upgraded to a full department.

Late in 1968 a memorandum from Curtin argued that the time had come to look at a PNG banking ordinance, divorced from Australian legislation.<sup>21</sup> Others argued, however, that separate legislation was not needed to give effect to the development of policies geared to PNG's needs, and Curtin's initiative temporarily lapsed. A later memorandum from Curtin argued for exemption of trading banks' business from the central bank's statutory reserve deposit requirements and liquidity conventions, again without effect.

Early in 1970 a major research project was initiated within the PNG Division to guide the Bank's policy making in the run-up to self-government and independence.<sup>22</sup> The project envisaged a study in four parts, covering a review of past developments; an assessment of the present situation (including the relevance of Australian legislation and policy, and the adequacy of the financial system); an examination of prospective issues in future development; and an analysis of the implications for the Reserve Bank. Prospective issues were identified as:

- (a) Separate currency.
- (b) The role of a central bank.
- (c) The pattern of institutional development:
  - (1) Foreign entry.
  - (2) Multi-purpose banks.

- (3) An indigenous bank.
- (4) The Development Bank.
- (5) Other specialist banks.
- (6) The future of the Savings and Loan movement.
- (d) The development of a market in financial assets.

It was intended that staff in both Sydney and Port Moresby be involved.

The study was substantially complete when in July 1971 the Minister for External Territories proposed a Committee on Banking in PNG, comprising representatives from External Territories, Treasury, the Reserve Bank and the PNG Administration.

Shortly before this, the Australian government had accepted the recommendation of the Select Committee (of the PNG House of Assembly) on Constitutional Development, that PNG should be prepared for internal self-government in the period 1972-76. Banking was identified as an area in which 'suitable arrangements would need to be developed' prior to self-government. The Committee's terms of reference directed it to make recommendations on the major elements of a framework appropriate to banking in PNG at self-government and at independence; the lines along which the PNG banking system should be developed over the next few years; and the nature and timing of the steps for setting up an appropriate banking system. Prospective currency arrangements were specifically excluded from the terms of reference.

The committee, chaired by Gerry Gutman of External Territories, held its inaugural meeting in Canberra in September 1971. The Bank's representatives were J.B. Wright (a former secretary of the Reserve Bank, then holding the title of adviser), J.A. Kirkwood (of the Bank's Banking Department), D.G. McKenna (who had recently joined the PNG Department, having previously been on secondment as deputy governor of the Bank Negara Malaysia), and the Bank's deputy manager, Henry ToRobert. With the exception of ToRobert, these were men of essentially conservative disposition with little direct experience of PNG.<sup>23</sup> The senior Treasury representative, Harold Heinrich, revealed no empathy for developments in PNG.<sup>24</sup> The first meeting was largely devoted to discussing possible extension of the terms of reference to include currency arrangements (the committee decided not to), and discussing publicity (it was agreed that low key publicity of the Committee's existence was desirable and that banks operating in PNG should be approached for their views, but that 'no specific invitation would be extended to academics to express their views'). Three more meetings were held during 1971, which considered a series of papers, mostly derived from the Reserve Bank's research project and including (for the third meeting) a *pro forma* banking ordinance.

By this time the desirability of localising banking legislation had been underlined by an 'in principle' proposal from the Bank of New South Wales to register a subsidiary, to be called the First Papua and New Guinea Bank Ltd, which would provide integrated trading and savings bank services. As early as 1963 the TPNG committee had suggested that banks operating in PNG be encouraged to transform their Territory branches into local subsidiary companies. In 1971 the PNG Department supported the idea of using the Bank of NSW's application as leverage to introduce a separate banking ordinance; but in the event the Bank of NSW was persuaded to hold off on its application pending the report of the Banking Committee. Also, an informal application from the First National City Bank to open a branch in PNG - challenging the Australian policy of excluding 'foreign' banks - was 'discouraged' following discussion with Treasury, though the PNG Department expressed support for the FNCB's entry.

The Banking Committee's progress was, however, slow. A note on the minutes of the fourth meeting (shortly before I left the Bank in January 1972) made the comment:

*It is disappointing, to say the least, to see that by December 1971 - the date initially set for completion of the draft preliminary report - the Committee has made so little progress towards a definition of issues, let alone a series of policy recommendations. The account of the fourth meeting reveals a lack of direction on major policy issues and the draft summary of recommendations is so trite as to be virtually useless, its only substantive content being a negative one - that there is no necessity to do anything before self-government.*

Such disappointment was heightened by the fact most of the substantive issues canvassed by the Banking Committee had been comprehensively addressed in the Reserve Bank before the Committee even met.

An interim report was eventually presented in January 1972.<sup>25</sup> It recommended that control of banking be transferred to local authorities 'as soon as practicable'; that PNG should have its own central bank; and that the business of the Commonwealth Banking Corporation in PNG should be transformed into a PNG institution. However, the Committee did not expect 'any immediate demand for self-government' from the new House of Assembly to be elected in 1972, and proposed a timetable which extended into 1974. Moreover the Committee commented that 'the full implications of the legislative changes required to implement the transfer of banking powers... have yet to be considered' - although extensive documentation had been prepared in the Bank in 1970 - and there were unresolved differences between External Territories, Treasury and the Bank as to the sequencing of transferring general banking powers, establishing a central bank, and granting full central banking powers. Indeed, in its response to the interim report External Territories argued that in recommending a central bank the report went further than the committee envisaged (suggesting that the term 'central monetary authority' be used rather than 'central bank', and that decisions about its nature and powers await discussion with the IMF). External Territories also stepped back from the recommendation on the Commonwealth Banking Corporation, suggesting that its continued operation in PNG was still an option.

The committee presented a number of arguments in favour of a separate central bank, but its recommendation was clearly influenced by consideration that 'an embryo central bank already exists' and that training of Papua New Guinean staff and operation of a local Advisory Committee on Central Banking had been initiated some time ago.

From the early 1960s to the early 1970s, relations between those responsible for the Bank's PNG operations and the personnel of External Territories had been cordial, though not especially close. Curtin, Phillips and later myself had good relations with Gutman - who shared the Bank's generally progressive attitude to the pace of development in PNG; on the other hand, Curtin especially had little time, intellectually, for External Territories secretaries Warwick Smith (1960-1970) or Hay (1970-1973), both of whom he saw as essentially conservative. Relations with Treasury, on the other hand, were never close and were sometimes antipathetic, reflecting in part a general ambivalence in relations between the Reserve Bank and Treasury, and in part the Treasury's apparent reluctance to embrace change in PNG. In contrast, by virtue of its longstanding presence in Port Moresby, the Bank probably had closer working relations with the Administration, and later with Papua New Guineans, then either External Territories or Treasury.

With the change of government which brought Whitlam to office in Australia, and the emergence of the Somare government in PNG, from 1972 the pace of change quickened and increasingly the initiative for change came not from Canberra or Sydney but from Port Moresby. In early 1972 a confidential 'Gearing-Up Plan' was prepared by officials in Port Moresby, listing activities to be carried out before self-government (then expected in December 1975); the list included a separate central bank and banking system. The establishment of a central bank and separate currency were identified as areas of potential conflict between Australia and PNG.<sup>26</sup>

The Committee on Banking submitted its final report in December 1972, and four months later the two governments announced agreement on future banking arrangements. This included transfer of control of banks and financial institutions operating in PNG to local authorities; the establishment of a central bank based on the Port Moresby office of the Reserve Bank; the creation of a PNG Banking Corporation to take over the bulk of the business of the Commonwealth Banking Corporation; and the merging of trading and savings banking operations. A *Central Banking Ordinance* and a *Banks and Financial Institutions Ordinance* were passed by the House of Assembly in September 1972 and the Bank of PNG was launched the following month, with ToRobert as its first governor. At a launching ceremony Prime Minister Somare paid tribute to the Reserve Bank's 'foresight and planning'.

### *The savings and loan movement*

In 1959 the Thomas-Ryan report had recommended the creation of credit unions as an appropriate means of drawing Papua New Guineans into the financial system. A follow-up survey by officers of the Bank in 1960 'found considerable interest and enthusiasm for the idea of credit unions, both in government circles and among such indigenous organisations as were contacted on the matter',<sup>27</sup> and in early 1961 Curtin and Phillips, accompanied by Elliott Elijah of the Administration's Cooperatives Registry, visited Fiji to examine experience with credit unions there before making a final commitment. A memorandum, written on their return, 'confirmed the view, already widely held, that the credit union type of activity had distinct possibilities as a primary training ground for the money economy',<sup>28</sup> and recommended that the Bank assist in their establishment. There was support for the idea in the administration, specifically from the Co-operatives Division; but since the latter lacked the resources to set up credit unions the task was left to the Reserve Bank, with the expectation that the commercial banks would provide some support.

Following a change in terminology, a *Savings and Loan Societies Ordinance* was passed in September 1961. In his second-reading speech the Territory treasurer, H.H. Reeve, described the savings and loan societies as a 'type of "pre-banking" system', intended to 'supplement' the banking system.<sup>29</sup> It was intended that the societies should:

1. Help to foster the habit of thrift among the people;
2. Provide education for their members in the fields of finance generally and financial responsibility in particular;
3. Enable the making of small loans for wise purposes which it would not be practicable for existing financial intermediaries to undertake;
4. Play some part in fostering capital formation in the Territory; and,
5. Place in the hands of members a valuable means of furthering their own development.<sup>30</sup>

In its 1964 report (p.25) the Bank described savings and loan societies as,

*... in effect, small scale co-operative banks. Their main functions are to mobilize small savings and to provide credit in small amounts. At the same time, they enable the indigenous people to gain valuable training and practical experience in the running of financial enterprises.*

The following year, it referred to the savings and loan movement as 'a sub-banking system designed to provide a stepping stone to the use of the established banking system and to an extent to supplement it'.

The first savings and loan society was formed in 1962 and Papua New Guineans were recruited for training in these operations. An officer of the Bank was appointed registrar of savings and loan societies and expatriate and indigenous staff were posted to Rabaul and Lae to encourage and assist in the development of societies and savings clubs. The commercial banks seconded several officers to the movement and



offices were established in Goroka, Mount Hagen and Kavieng. In June 1963 there were four savings and loan societies, with membership of 209 and funds of \$6,256; by June 1967 the number had grown to 189, with membership of over 10,000 and balances of \$0.6 million. In 1966 a national Federation of Savings and Loan Societies was established, with funds from a levy on all society members, to provide some common services, including insurance of members' funds and the channelling of funds between societies to enable a more efficient use of the members' money. Also in 1966 a Gazelle League of Savings and Loan Societies was formed, to provide advice, training, and audit facilities to members, and organise a discount purchasing service. In 1969 the Gazelle League employed six staff - all indigenous (one being John Kaputin) - and owned a building and vehicles. Another League was formed in the Eastern Highlands in 1967, on a more modest scale. (Among its directors were Hari Gotoha and Soso Subi, two Gorokans referred to in Finney's *Big-Men and Business*.)<sup>31</sup>

The history of the savings and loan movement has been recounted, atleast in part, elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> The movement enjoyed rapid growth during the 1960s. Although the more successful societies were concentrated in Port Moresby and Rabaul - where better educated Papua New Guineans provided both a pool of relatively skilled manpower and source of income and demand for loans - adventurous young field officers enthusiastically set up savings clubs and societies throughout Morobe and the highlands (some of which could not be relocated years later). By the late 1960s, the movement was represented in fifteen of the eighteen districts. However, poor understanding of the functioning of societies and a chronic problem of non-repayment of loans had 'tended to undermine the societies' reputation and image among members', and with only 41 per cent of members' funds invested in loans to members at June 1969, much of the effect of savings and loan activities was to transfer indigenous savings to the banks for on-lending to non-indigenes.<sup>33</sup> These problems were only partially addressed in the early 1970s.

The development of the savings and loan movement represented an early and innovative initiative in trying to develop financial institutional arrangements appropriate to the needs of Papua New Guineans, when the commercial banks (with the minor exception of the Commonwealth Savings Bank) showed almost no interest in a Papua New Guinean clientele.<sup>34</sup> In developing this cooperative credit system the Bank created a structure that was based fundamentally on the notion of self-help and was, at all levels, localised to quite a high degree.<sup>35</sup>

### *Staff development*

In its second annual report, in 1961, the Reserve Bank noted that two Papua New Guineans had been sent by the Bank to Brisbane, to upgrade their secondary school qualifications. The following year another two were sent to Brisbane and one (Henry ToRobert) was enrolled in the Economics Faculty at Sydney University. In 1963 the Bank's report observed that indigenous officers were being trained to 'assume duties currently undertaken by Australians', and noted that six officers were undergoing further secondary training in Australia, including the first woman. Attempts to allocate further bursaries for study at Sydney University in 1963 were unsuccessful, but a second Papua New Guinean (Nick Bokas) was enrolled in Economics the following year. ToRobert graduated in 1967 (becoming PNG's second graduate) and after attending central banking courses in Sri Lanka and Washington (at the IMF) returned as economic research officer in the Bank's Port Moresby branch, which was already being developed as an embryo central bank. With the establishment of UPNG in 1965, the Bank's 1967 report recorded that seven officers were undergoing further secondary training in Australia, five were attending tertiary institutions in PNG on Bank scholarships, and eighteen were taking correspondence courses. The same year the Bank announced the formation, in Port Moresby, of a Bankers' College, a residential college which provided training courses for officers in the five banking institutions then operating in PNG.

In addition to its own trainees, the Reserve Bank's PNG Division provided a point of contact for other

Papua New Guineans studying in Australia: both Bernard Narokobi (studying law at Sydney University) and Charles Lepani (Commerce at the University of New South Wales) spent vacations working in the Division, where they gained experience of central banking and economic analysis - and were able to discuss their university assignments with the Bank's research staff. John Kaputin (who was briefly employed with the Gazelle League of Savings and Loan Societies) was another occasional visitor to the Bank's headquarters in Sydney.

In 1964 the Reserve Bank had 20 officers in PNG, of whom 8 were Papua New Guinean; the following year, of a staff of 31, 13 were Papua New Guinean; by 1967 the respective figures were 58 and 44. At a time when serious localisation had barely begun in the Administration, let alone in the private sector, and was virtually non-existent in the commercial banking sector,<sup>36</sup> the Reserve Bank had thus achieved 76% localisation of staff and had put in place a substantial training program for its own staff and for the banking system generally.

Moreover, in its Sydney head office, the Bank's PNG operations attracted the interest of some of the Bank's brighter young and middle-range staff, ensuring a lively intellectual environment for the expanding Port Moresby office and especially for its emerging young graduate staff, who were encouraged to take part in public seminars and to publish.<sup>37</sup>

This trend continued in the late 1960s and early 1970s, providing the nucleus for a well trained independent central bank. The first UPNG scholars graduated in 1970. By the early 1970s, however, it was clear that not all could become governor, and with the Administration and private sector making a belated effort to localise, many left the Bank for positions elsewhere. To Robert remained, becoming manager in 1972 and the Bank of PNG's first governor the following year. Bokas also stayed, later becoming deputy governor. An incomplete list of those who left reveals just how much the Bank's far-sighted staff development initiatives contributed to PNG's post-independence leadership: it includes Paul Pora (who returned to the Western Highlands as a council clerk, subsequently becoming a prosperous businessman and prominent member of parliament), Sinai Brown (later secretary and premier of East New Britain), Tom Fox (sometime chairman of the PNG Investment Corporation), Paliau Lucas (subsequently with the Central Planning Office and then Housing Commissioner, before returning to local politics in Manus), Elison Kaivovo (who became finance officer in the East New Britain provincial government), Eliakim To Bolton (subsequently a senior officer in the Department of Finance), Longas Solomon (seconded as finance officer in the East Sepik provincial government and later PNG's consul-general in Sydney) and Epel Tito (a savings and loan officer who was later Minister for Defence).

When the Port Moresby office was transformed into the Bank of PNG in 1973, 85% of its staff had been localised including the entire female staff.

### **The issue of separate currency**

The question of whether PNG should have its own currency was raised in the Department of Territories as early as 1953. At that time the Reserve Bank opposed the idea, on the grounds that it was hard to imagine a PNG currency not fixed to the Australian dollar or supported by Australia, that it would be unlikely to yield worthwhile benefits to PNG, and that it would introduce confusion in trade, inconvenience to visitors, and additional work for banks and traders.<sup>38</sup> Territories concurred. The issue was raised again nearly a decade later, first in the context of a forthcoming visit by an IBRD mission, and again in relation to the commencement of planning for decimal currency in Australia in 1966. On the latter occasion - notwithstanding the opinion of the Reserve Bank's manager in Port Moresby (Phillips), that if separate currency were likely to come within, say, ten years of 1966, its introduction with decimalisation would seem sensible<sup>39</sup> - the prevailing view in the Bank, and the view passed on to the acting treasurer in Port Moresby, was that, 'we consider it better that the Territory should continue to use Australian currency'.<sup>40</sup>

The IBRD agreed, saying 'at this time a separate monetary system would not be to the economic advantage of the Territory'.<sup>41</sup>

In introducing legislation to implement decimal currency in 1964, the PNG Treasurer told the House of Assembly that, although 'serious consideration' had been given to the introduction of a Territory currency, and although 'It is elementary that working as we are towards the independence of the Territory ... a local currency will be introduced at some time or another', the Administration believed that the interests of the Territory would be best served at that stage by the adoption of the new Australian decimal currency.<sup>42</sup> (Eight months previously the Minister for Territories had denied an ABC report that the Administration was considering a separate currency for PNG.)

Over the next few years there was little reference to separate currency. Somare later said that in 1968 he had suggested that PNG should have its own currency, and 'hardly anyone took me seriously';<sup>43</sup> and in 1969 Curtin had supported separate currency at a Council on New Guinea Affairs Seminar.<sup>44</sup> However, when in 1970 the Reserve Bank embarked on a major study of the future of PNG's monetary and banking system, possible future currency arrangements were on the research agenda. In October 1970 a paper entitled 'Separate Currency - What is it All About?' was presented to the Advisory Committee on Central Banking (ACCENT) in Port Moresby. Amongst other things it spelt out some of the advantages and disadvantages of integration into the Australian monetary system. Another ACCENT paper in June 1971 discussed 'The Question of Currency Reserves in a Developing Country'. In May 1971 a paper on 'Separate Currency. A First Look at Questions of Implementation' was discussed at a Reserve Bank staff seminar; it looked at alternative possible currency arrangements and what was needed to implement them. A copy of the paper was sent to External Territories. The same month a visiting UN mission recommended that,

*at a later stage the creation of a territorial currency, fully backed by the Australian dollar and freely convertible into Australian currency, might be considered in order to facilitate the observation of monetary transactions relating to the Territory.*

By this time, however, the issue had become a point of some contention.

In April 1970, ANU Professor Heinz Arndt had addressed the Nuigini Economic Society in Port Moresby on the subject of separate currency. Arndt argued, along the same lines as the Reserve Bank's Port Moresby manager in 1963, that nationalist sentiment would demand a separate currency for an independent PNG and saw a strong case for its introduction well before independence, so that the step could be taken in conditions of relative calm.<sup>45</sup> Arndt's view caused concern in the Administration, where it was believed that merely talking about the possibility of a separate currency could lead to an outflow of capital. The following month the Administration issued a press release (No. 661, 25 May 1970) which denied that any consideration was being given to a separate currency. (Similar denials were repeated in January 1971 and October 1971.) The subject was raised again by academic economists at an ANZAAS conference in Port Moresby in August. About this time, also, the Reserve Bank's PNG Department proposed to discuss the subject with Treasury and Territories but was informed that senior officials thought this inappropriate; instead, we arranged with Professor Arndt a seminar at the ANU, at which papers were presented by Arndt, Phillips, and Don Stammer. In August 1971 I presented a further seminar on separate currency to the Nuigini Economic Society in Port Moresby, incurring the displeasure of the deputy administrator (Newman) and McCasker. What Newman and others failed to appreciate was that, apart from Newman's own statement in 1964, that 'it is elementary that ... a local currency will be introduced at some time', the subject had been raised on several occasions, and discussed in the Bank's Advisory Committee, and business people in PNG *expected* that such discussion should be taking place; when they denied that any consideration was being given, officials simply confirmed business people's fears that a separate currency was to be introduced and that its effects must be bad (why else would the Administration deny that

consideration was being given to the subject when it was so obviously under discussion?).

For reasons that are not clear to me (but presumably had to do with the general paranoia about the subject), in July 1970 Prime Minister Gorton had issued an edict that no study of currency should be undertaken without reference to him. When in 1971 the interdepartmental Committee on Banking in PNG was convened, the subject of currency arrangements was specifically omitted from its terms of reference. At its inaugural meeting, however, External Territories Secretary David Hay suggested 'that the situation had changed considerably since then' [July 1970] and that his minister would be prepared to seek the government's approval for a study of future currency arrangements if the committee thought that this was desirable or necessary. In fact, the Administrator had requested that the Committee's work be extended to embrace an examination of future currency arrangements, suggesting that the Administrator's Executive Council would expect to be advised on the currency question.<sup>46</sup> Under pressure from the senior Treasury representative (Heinrich), and with the concurrence of the Reserve Bank representatives, the Committee resolved not to widen its terms of reference; instead, it agreed that the Reserve Bank would prepare a paper setting out the policy options, to be considered by a working group comprising Treasury, Reserve Bank and External Territories officers.<sup>47</sup> In a handwritten note of 30 September, following a phone conversation with Heinrich about how the issue was to be addressed, Curtin wrote,

*Mr Heinrich seems to be pernickety and ostrich-like about Currency. This question will not go away as a result of verbal quibblings. It's a question which, if ignored creates more troubles (and magnifies itself) than if faced up to and at least ventilated.*

Correspondence between Curtin and PNG's treasurer, H.P. Ritchie, also reveal that by October 1971 PNG's treasurer, at least, had come to the view that 'the sooner PNG has its own currency .... the better' .<sup>48</sup>

In a letter to acting Treasurer McMahon (7 October 1971), Barnes accepted the Committee's decision, but expressed 'full agreement' with the Administrator's view and urged that the study be commenced at an early date. Two developments may have sharpened the minister's focus. First Gough Whitlam had asked, in the Australian parliament, whether the Committee on Banking was authorised to inquire into and report upon a separate currency for PNG. Second, in the context of rumours of an imminent Australian devaluation, primary producing interests in PNG had made representations to the minister pointing out that they would lose from such a realignment and would seek compensation.<sup>49</sup> In a letter worthy of Yes, Minister's Sir Humphrey Appleby, Treasurer Snedden responded: 'The question of currency is, as I feel sure you would agree, a delicate one with important political and psychological ramifications .... For these reasons, I believe that we should be careful not to seek to influence the wishes of the local people....'

Shortly after this the PNG House of Assembly passed a resolution urging the Australian government to restore the Australian dollar to its former parity with the US dollar, and the chairman of W.R. Carpenter Holdings Ltd., at a company annual meeting in Port Moresby, observed that PNG was unable to counter international currency manipulation because it did not have its own currency. Barnes again wrote to the Treasurer in early December observing that the government's capacity to respond to questions about separate currency was limited, 'because we have deliberately refrained from studying the subject until recently'; 'I now regard the matter as urgent', the minister wrote, and urged the Treasurer to extend the Committee's terms of reference. But Treasury maintained its opposition, and was supported by the Bank's senior representative, Wright.

Having finally had its role determined (it was to consider a paper, prepared by the Reserve Bank, to be cleared by Treasury, External Territories and the Bank, shown to the Administration, and then formally submitted to External Territories for submission to the Administrator), the currency working group met in Canberra in December 1971. A substantial paper ('Currency Arrangements for PNG'), based on the paper discussed at a seminar within the Reserve Bank in May 1971, was considered. A diary note from the

meeting records that there was broad agreement on the contents of the paper, though Treasury wanted a comment on prospective profits from currency issue to be qualified 'to take account of the possibility that any profits from a note issue would be taken into account in the determination of the Commonwealth grant to PNG' (an improbable possibility which in fact was never contemplated), and considered that comments on timing<sup>50</sup> were 'not appropriate'. It was agreed that a simplified version of the paper should be prepared for the Administrator, subject to the necessary departmental clearance, and another meeting was set for January 1972. In January, however, the Treasury representative failed to appear; on enquiry Ingevic and I were told that his supervisor (Heinrich) considered him 'too busy' to attend the meeting.

I left the Bank soon after this. In March I was told by former Bank colleagues that Treasury was attempting to either pigeonhole or dilute the working group's paper, and was encountering little resistance from the Bank's representatives on the Banking Committee. But as 1972 progressed, the action in respect of policy development for PNG shifted increasingly from Canberra and Sydney to Port Moresby. In February national Pangu Pati president, Gavera Rea, was reported as saying that an independent PNG should have its own currency.<sup>51</sup> In July ToRobert (who became manager of the Port Moresby branch in that month) complained that PNG was impotent to protect its interests against world currency movements while tied to the Australian dollar.<sup>52</sup> The same month, encouraged by Curtin, I submitted a paper examining alternative currency arrangements to *New Guinea* (May 1972), and at the request of Paul Ryan (secretary of the Chief Minister's Department), prepared a simplified version of the paper for the Administrator's Executive Council (cabinet).

In July 1973 Finance Minister Julius Chan announced that cabinet had decided that PNG should have its own currency as soon as practicable (but not before December 1974, and initially with Australian and PNG currencies in joint circulation). A Currency Working Group, chaired initially by Chan and later by ToRobert, was established to coordinate planning for the currency. The new currency was introduced in April 1975. In launching the kina and toea Prime Minister Somare said, 'to have our own national money has long been one of my dreams .... It makes me very proud to see and receive this beautiful money'.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Reserve Bank and decolonisation**

Due largely to the foresight of Coombs and the dedication of Curtin, the Reserve Bank became involved in PNG early and closely. It sought to assist in the development of a financial and banking system appropriate to PNG's needs, particularly through the savings and loan movement; it established the foundations for an independent central bank; it was a pioneer in training young Papua New Guineans for senior positions, and, for a while at least, it helped keep alive the discussion of a separate currency. Coombs, Curtin, Phillips and others also promoted intellectual debate through their involvement in and the Bank's support of the Council on New Guinea Affairs and the Waigani Seminar.

Frequently the Bank found itself pushing against an essential conservatism in Canberra (and sometimes in Port Moresby). Ironically, as self-government drew near and the future of banking came under inter-departmental review, representation of the Bank's views shifted largely from its PNG Department to other parts of the Bank, where attitudes were less progressive. But by 1972 the real action was not in Canberra or Sydney but in Port Moresby, where ToRobert and a staff of Papua New Guineans and committed expatriates carried forward the momentum of Coombs, Curtin and Phillips. ToRobert became probably the longest-serving senior appointment in independent PNG and the Bank of PNG a bastion of financial responsibility in an increasingly challenged financial system. That, perhaps, is the ultimate measure of the Bank's role.

1. H.C. Coombs, *Trial Balance. Issues of my Working Life*, Melbourne, 1981, 172.
2. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates [Representatives] 183:4052, 4054, 4 July 1945.
3. Geoff Gray discounts the link, pointing to the role of Alf Conlon and the Australian Army's wartime Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs. G.G. Gray, "The next focus of power to fall under the spell of this little gang". *Anthropology and Australia's postwar policy in PNG*, *War and Society* 14(2) (1996). Also see Scott MacWilliam, 'PNG in the 1940s: empire and legend', in D. Lowe (ed.), *Australia and the End of Empires. The Impact of Decolonisation in Australia's Near North, 1945-65*. Geelong, 1996. Coombs seems to have had a fairly close personal association with Conlon.
4. In 1949 the Commonwealth Bank included the Commonwealth Savings Bank, the Commonwealth Trading Bank and the central bank. In January 1960 the central banking functions were separated and transferred to the Reserve Bank of Australia which was created in 1959. Coombs became governor of the Reserve Bank.
5. M.J. Phillips, 'Banking', in P. Ryan (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Papua and New Guinea*, Melbourne, 1972.
6. O.H.K. Spate, C.S. Belshaw and T.W. Swan, 'Some Problems of Development in New Guinea. Report of a Working Committee of the Australian National University'. Canberra. Mimeo, 1953.
7. The working committee identified three major developmental needs: roads; the strengthening of agricultural work; and fiscal reform and the fostering of financial responsibilities.
8. I can find no discussion of banking in the report apart from the brief observation that 'net finance from the banking system is negative' (that is, the banks in effect used funds deposited by customers in PNG to lend to customers, including the government, in Australia) and comments that 'The importance of agrarian credit [for "native production"] ... cannot be overstressed' and that 'some suitable form of credit will have to be devised' (Spate, Belshaw and Swan, 'Some Problems', paras 37.4, 14.3, 28.2).
9. Coombs, *Trial Balance*, 172.
10. J.R. Thomas and D. Ryan, *Report of a Survey on the Use of Money and the Need for Credit by the Indigenous People of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea*, Commonwealth Bank, Mimeo, 1959.
11. One of the major beneficiaries under this scheme was a study of cocoa dieback.
12. Phillips, an agricultural economist, later succeeded Curtin as manager of the PNG Department and subsequently became deputy governor of the Bank.
13. Kumaina later became registrar of savings and loan societies, but eventually left the Bank to return to East New Britain as a businessman.
14. IBRD, *The Economic Development of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. Report of a Mission Organized by the IBRD*, Baltimore, 1964, 374, 368.
15. P.W.E. Curtin, 'The World Bank Report. A review', *New Guinea* 1(1) (1965).
16. Coombs 1965:62, 63, 64.
17. From 1961 there had been a Central Planning and Policy Committee, but it had no full-time staff. Following the World Bank mission's visit a Projects and Planning Team was created; prior to the appointment of McCasker, two Reserve Bank officers (A. MacIntyre and M.J. Phillips) acted as team leaders and a young graduate was seconded to the team. Another Bank officer, Ron White, assisted ANU economists in preparing national income accounts.
18. P.W.E. Curtin, 1968. 'How to be inconsistent', *New Guinea* 3(1) (1968).
19. RBA Report 1966, 25.

20. Peter Ferguson joined Phillips in 1964. Ferguson had been working with the savings and loan movement in Rabaul. Later he returned as deputy governor of the Bank of PNG.
21. A similar proposal had come from Curtin five years earlier, but CBAC had doubted whether the government would accept such a proposal, and did not pursue it.
22. 'Research Project - Financial System for PNG' (PNG Division, 29 July 1970).
23. Wright did not attend later meetings and Kirkwood was replaced by D. Parr, without changing the tenor of the Bank's representation.
24. The full list of those attending the inaugural meeting was Wright, Kirkwood, McKenna ToRobert (Reserve Bank); Heinrich, T.W.J. Vear, R. Beetham (Treasury - though both Vear and Beetham were former Reserve Bank officers); H.P. Ritchie, V. Navuru (Administration); G.O. Gutman, P. Kellaway, E. Ingevics and M.J. Hilyard (External Territories).
25. 'Committee on Banking in PNG. Interim Report'. 26 January 1972. Mimeo.
26. T.E. Barnett, 'Policy-making in the transfer of powers from Australia', in J.A. Ballard (ed.), *Policy-Making in a New State: PNG 1972-77*, St. Lucia, 1981, 49, 53
27. A.R. Lanes, *Financial Institutions in a Developing Economy. A Study of the Role of Savings and Loan Societies in Papua and New Guinea*, MEd thesis, University of Sydney, 1969.
28. P.W.E. Curtin and M.J. Phillips, 'Credit Societies for Papua-New Guinea' (internal memorandum, Reserve Bank of Australia, March 1961).
29. T.P.N.G., *Legislative Council Debates September 1961*.
30. A.W. Elvery, 'Savings and loan societies in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea', *Australian Territories* 2(2) (1962), 25-31.
31. B.R. Finney, *Big-Men and Business*, ANU, 1973.
32. One of the Bank's officers, Ross Lanes, wrote a MEd thesis on the subject (Financial Institutions in a Developing Economy). Other accounts are Elvery, 'Savings and Loans Societies'; C. Lesley Andrews, 'Responses to the operation of savings and loan societies in two areas of Papua', Waigaini Seminar, 1969; and R.V. Kumaina, 'Savings and loan societies in PNG', *Journal of the PNG Society* 4(1), 1970.
33. Lanes, *Financial Institutions in a Developing Economy*, iii.
34. A survey of trading bank lending to indigenous borrowers undertaken in 1972 revealed that the banks' interest was still minimal. R.J. May, 'Trading bank lending to indigenous borrowers - summary of a 1972 survey', *Bank of PNG Quarterly Economic Bulletin* June Quarter 1974, 1-5.
35. At June 1969, of the 38 staff of the Savings and Loan Societies Registry 29 (including the deputy registrar) were Papua New Guinean.
36. As late as 1970, indigenous employment in the banks in PNG was as follows:

	male	female	total
Reserve Bank	59	26	85
PNG Development Bank	63	-	63
Commonwealth Banking Corp.	28	2	30
Bank of NSW	30	12	42
ANZ	10	-	10
National	4	-	4

37. E.g. ToRobert, 'New Guinea's leadership', published in *New Guinea* 1(3), 1965.
38. Letter from Coombs to Territories, 6 October 1953.
39. Memorandum from manager, Port Moresby 24 June 1963.
40. Letter from deputy governor to manager, Port Moresby, July 1963. The Bank's analysis was set out in two internal memoranda: 'Establishment of Separate Currency' (Research Department, 19 December 1962) and 'Memorandum for Central Banking Advisory Committee. Action in T.P.N.G. in View of Australian Change to Decimal Currency' (Investment Department, 3 July 1963, with comments by Curtin and Elvery).
41. IBRD, *Report*, 1964, 368
42. *House of Assembly Debates* Vol. I No. 1, 11 June 1964, 51.
43. *Bank of PNG Quarterly Economic Bulletin* March Quarter 1975:2.
44. P.W.E. Curtin, 'Money and self-government. Localising the finance structure', *New Guinea* 4(4), 1969/70.
45. Arndt's paper was passed on to D.W.C. Allen in the Bank of England, who commented, '... we thought that Arndt's paper takes a very practical line and we broadly agree with his analysis and conclusions'.
46. Draft letter from Barnes to Acting Treasurer (McMahon) (September 1971).
47. The officers 'tentatively suggested' were myself, Hogget (Treasury) and Ingevics (Territories).
48. Ritchie to Curtin, 11 October 1971.
49. 'Effects of Currency Re-Alignments on PNG' had been prepared in the Bank in October 1971.
50. 'If PNG is ever to have its own currency there is a sound case for introducing it sooner rather than later .... Deferment of separate currency (and, *a fortiori*, embargo of discussion of the subject) will not prevent speculation and may aggravate the effects of it'.
51. *Post-Courier*, 3 February 1972.
52. *Post-Courier* 11 July 1972, p.1.
53. Speeches by Somare, Chan and ToRobert are reproduced in *Bank of PNG Quarterly Economic Bulletin* March Quarter 1975.



## Australian Companies and the Challenge of Decolonisation: Burns Philp

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One of the least considered aspects of decolonisation in Papua New Guinea has been the nature and operations of firms, international and domestic, during this seminal moment. The subject was given popular as well as academic importance during and just after self-government and Independence, but there remains no re-assessment of the contending claims advanced at that time.

Since the claims were often made by protagonists in the political battles of that period, it is not surprising that the nationalist character of the accounts was foremost. Thus, for instance, descriptions informed by the then-popular dependency position emphasised the relative powerlessness of the transitional state when faced with the supposed superior capacities - including mobility - of major international, primarily Australian, firms.<sup>1</sup> The standard rebuttal of such a claim was to enumerate, in a counter-factual, formally logical manner, the deficiencies of such a description. Thus, concluded Garnaut of the most substantial dependencist account, that of Amarshi, Good and Mortimer: 'The facts of the Papua New Guinea experience, as distinct from the authors' concoction, are not consistent with the predictions of the (dependency) theory'.<sup>2</sup>

Here, a generation later, Burns Philp is re-examined as one of the pre-eminent international firms then operating in PNG. With unrestricted access to the company records, a more substantial account should appear than that constructed during the tussles which surrounded decolonisation.

However this is not an attempt empirically to re-examine previous accounts, either of the primarily dependencist version or those advanced by its critics. Instead the intention is to place companies at the centre of another description of the transition from colonial to post-colonial state. With this focus, it can be shown that uncertainty is warranted for the firm which was then the largest non-mining conglomerate in PNG, as well as the largest private employer. (I expect that the same or similar points could be made about other major firms, including Steamships and WR Carpenters.)

I have previously shown how, contrary to the earlier established view, Burns Philp responded to the prospect of self-government and compulsory land acquisition on its plantation operations.<sup>3</sup> Internal reorganisation as well as revitalization and reduction of approximately 20,000 acres in company largeholdings took place. Productivity increases, by replanting and new planting of coconut palms and cocoa trees, plus cost-cutting measures at a time of substantial wage increases, were attained on many holdings. Not until the mid-1980s did Burns Philp sell its PNG largeholdings, as part of the major re-direction of the firm that continues to the present.

It is now possible to show how the reformed direction given to the plantation operations was part and parcel of a much broader change in the company as an international entity. This change had begun in the mid-1960s, and coincided with the retirement of managing director James Burns and long-serving general manager Joseph Mitchell. The indeterminacy of political outcomes in Papua New Guinea assumed continuing importance at the very moment when the new management grappled with declining profitability for the whole firm, operating in Australia, the USA and the UK, as well as in the South Pacific. As returns from its massive investment portfolio declined, Burns Philp shipping operations faced heightened competition and cost pressures, including wage and working conditions demands from militant, self-confident Australian unions. An Australian network of stores in country towns, built up after World War II, became less profitable, prompting efforts to reorganise and sell these shops. In Papua New Guinea, where Burns Philp's merchandise operations had targeted primarily expatriate state employees and European settlers, the end of expansion and reduction in the number of positions filled by expatriates also forced reform upon company management. In Fiji the firm was under competitive pressure, especially from Indian

traders.

In short, a dangerous decline in profitability made it imperative that company management respond strategically to any and all conditions which heightened the uncertainty of accumulation. Consequently PNG conditions of the same period, while important for management calculations, were always assessed in conjunction with other threats, including the appearance in the late 1960s of British takeover specialist and asset-stripper Slater Walker on the Australian share market. Thus the very profitability of some PNG operations, especially the rapidly expanding motor vehicle sales section, made these activities important for the whole firm at a time when many other assets were under-performing. Similarly Burns Philp's immediate post-Independence expansion in PNG, including attempts to develop hotel and other tourism-related ventures, was made on the basis of international calculations of profitability, which always emphasised the uncertainty of accumulation in any particular territorial space.

A sense of the uncertainty as well as the revitalisation of the firm's operations then being attempted was given in 1977, after PNG's Independence, by Burns Philp's group general manager, in evidence to the Australian Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. Mr P.C. Best stated:

*There has been an inference drawn over previous years that we were withdrawing from the islands. This is not so. We are continuing in our island operations but what we need to do is to accelerate the growth of our Australian activities which have been going backwards and not forwards.<sup>4</sup>*

Indeed, as Best was well aware, the firm was at that moment engaged in substantial new investments in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, as well as Australia in an increasingly anxious drive to transform operations. Transformation was necessary because the firm which had once been in the vanguard of Australian companies had become 'only average' in terms of the ratio of after-tax profits to shareholders' funds.

The first part of the paper shows how, in the previous decade, the firm had reached a major turning point, with a new management attempting to revitalise one of Australia's oldest trading firms during a period when the long post-war boom came to an end. That is, contrary to the common assumption that Burns Philp faced the political circumstances of decolonization from a position of commercial strength, the firm was more vulnerable than it had ever been. An episode in the firm's Papua New Guinea operations is now examined to show the distance between the popular characterisation of Burns Philp and the view from 7 Bridge St., Sydney, the head office of the group's parent company. The episode, used repeatedly by radical nationalists to show Burns Philp's omnipotence and duplicity in the immediate pre-Independence period, was the sale of 26% of Burns Philp (New Guinea) to the newly established PNG Investment Corporation (PNGIC). Contrary to the established version, of a firm deftly manipulating circumstances to maximum advantage, it can now be shown how senior management in the PNG subsidiary as well as at head office were subject to circumstances beyond their control which threatened attempts to rebuild profitability. The circumstances - including decolonisation - only heightened the uncertainty surrounding moves to reposition the firm as a corporate leader.

### **Burns Philp-from Flagship to Sinking Ship?**

By the early 1960s, while dividends still flowed to shareholders, as they had done since World War II from the principal subsidiary companies and the main firm, the directions followed by an 'old guard' of senior managers no longer kept the firm in the ranks of Australia's most profitable companies. In particular, as yearly profits were increasingly turned into passive investments, Burns Philp drifted. With managing director James Burns in his eighties, and general manager Joseph Mitchell over ninety when he retired in 1966, the firm occupied an especially vulnerable niche in the Australian corporate structure. Although James Burns, Mitchell and another octogenarian

director retired almost simultaneously, even their replacements represented considerable continuity with the past of the 'merchant and shipowners' firm established to operate first in eastern Australia and then in the South Pacific eighty years earlier.

The senior management replacements, including the third generation of the founding Burns family, Chairman J.D.O. Burns, had chafed at the stagnation and came to office determined to implement changes. However it was the 1968 appearance of British corporate raider Slater Walker on Australian share registers which really alerted Burns Philp's management to the urgency of their position. Far from being 'immune to take overs and asset-stripping raids because of the nature of its interlocking ownership' as its critics claimed a decade later,<sup>5</sup> at the end of the 1960s Burns Philp's management had to engage in unprecedented defensive measures, some of which raised criticism in Australian corporate circles regarding their legality and propriety. One particular measure, a 'share swap' with Mauri Bros and Thomson was inspired entirely by the threat which Slater Walker posed to both firms.<sup>6</sup> That is, this particular inter-locking share exchange was constructed from a position of weakness, not strength.

Over the next decade, the share portfolio was reduced substantially. These funds, as well as profits, and for the first time in the firm's history, major borrowings, were invested in takeovers and new ventures. Many of the acquired operations were in areas with little connection to the firm's previous areas of operations, as senior management tried to 'pick winners' in an increasingly volatile investment climate. It was in this period that the firm began the shift in strategic direction, from a primarily trading company to the international manufacturing conglomerate of the present.

But in order to restrict the level of borrowings, needed for expansion, existing activities had to be made more profitable, even if over-all conditions made such efforts difficult. At the same time, management were aware that the political climate, in the South Pacific and Australia, was turning against them. (The firm later re-arranged operations in Fiji and the New Hebrides-Vanuatu, as well as PNG.) Redirection had to include a strategy for dealing with political opposition, as well as declining profitability in areas of previous activity, and grasping new opportunities for investment.

Plantation operations in PNG epitomised the mixture of political opposition and commercial difficulties. These were operated through subsidiaries of the Head Office and not BP(NG), with plantation inspection, appointments of managers and nearly all strategic decisions taken and implemented without direct reference to management in the latter firm. As probably the largest private landowner, with holdings throughout coastal and island PNG, the firm was well aware of the growing militancy of squatters and other indigenous demands for compulsory acquisition. Indeed, during 1973 and 1974 BP devised a relatively sophisticated strategy for dealing with the threat to its plantation ownership, trading undeveloped and less profitable land for a greater measure of security on the better holdings where a re-investment programme gained considerable political kudos.<sup>7</sup>

However this strategy was itself a negotiated, less than desired, outcome, a consequence of the failure of another preferred direction. Indeed, the preferred direction bore a remarkable similarity to the post facto description of events constructed by Donaldson and Turner, cited below, who understood Burns Philp's need for political support but not the barriers in the way of the firm obtaining its initial objectives. To understand the point, it is necessary to turn to the controversial purchase by the PNGIC of equity in Burns Philp(NG).

### **Burns Philp and the PNG Investment Corporation's Share Purchase**

In 1978, Donaldson and Turner repeated what had become the standard description of Burns Philp (New Guinea)'s 1972 sale of one eighth of its equity to the PNGIC, claiming:

*As they had done in the blackbirding days, BPs had turned adversity to advantage...insur[ing] themselves against expropriation, [finding] a buyer when business confidence in Papua New Guinea was low... made the new buyer of 12.5% pay more for*

*the shares than they were really worth, and made more capital available for expansion within Australia.*<sup>8</sup>

This claim first appeared four years earlier, in late September 1974 through a parliamentary question to Chief Minister Michael Somare, and in the University of Papua New Guinea student paper.<sup>9</sup> The latter claimed, regarding the PNGIC purchase of shares in BP(NG):

*The Australian capitalists are now leaving and they are making damn sure that they are going to take as much out of the country with them as they can. For a number of years they have been smuggling out the wealth of this country by cheating and deliberate non-disclosure of their activities, supplemented by blatant lies. ...What is even more sickening, if we are to believe the rather convincing evidence unearthed by Mr Gregory...is that these firms are robbing this country with the active connivance and support of the Government, or rather white wantoks in the Public Service who still hold all the positions of real power behind all the black flower pots... The Investment Corporation is nothing more than a disinvestment corporation for expatriate businesses.*

Burns Philp management held an entirely different view, frequently describing the negotiating stance adopted by PNGIC, as well as Australian government and colonial officials, as 'blackmail'. A brief outline of the opening positions in negotiations as well as the final outcome makes it possible to shine a different light on the PNGIC equity purchase than has hitherto been presented.

When discussions began between Burns Philp(NG) managing director Bert Goodsell and Investment Corporation officials in late 1971 - early 1972, the former was in regular contact with HIO Sydney about the direction to be pursued in negotiations. Senior management in both locations was in agreement about the strengths and weaknesses of the company's over-all position, although the

PNG management was much more subject to moods of optimism and pessimism. As the HO General Manager M.'Dan' O'Connor stated in a file letter to Chairman of Directors JDO Burns in February, 1972, following a lengthy letter from Goodsell:

*If we are vulnerable at all in PNG, undoubtedly our main area of vulnerability lies in the plantations and I have always felt that a share placement [with the PNGIC], with the idea of giving the indigene a feeling of participation in a profitable local enterprise, should encompass the plantation interests as well. He is less likely to turn a greedy eye on our valuable plantations if he realises that he has a vested interest in them (particularly if natives are encouraged to accept positions as Plantation Managers) and I therefore like Mr Goodsell's idea of "bringing all our eggs into one basket" and selling the Plantation Companies to the New Guinea Company.*

Unfortunately for the firm there were substantial obstacles in the road of realising such an objective. Apart from the fact that the principal threat to the plantations came from a certain category of indigenes, landless and landshort squatters, who were unlikely to be placated by the sale of equity in the plantations to the PNGIC, these obstacles arose in governing and not merely marginal political circles in PNG and Australia. So substantial were the barriers that despite the best efforts of Burns Philp officials, the maximum they could ever obtain was the PNGIC taking a five year option-from 1973-to purchase the plantations, an option which was never exercised. The plantations were never transferred to BP(NG).

The principal obstacles to BP attaining its initial objective were three.

First, the PNGIC was as aware as Burns Philp of the uncertainty surrounding plantation operations but did not see the matter in the same terms as company officials. However much squatters were 'natives' to Burns Philp officials and the senior expatriate management of the PNGIC, they were a threat to many capitalist enterprises which depended upon largeholding ownership, regardless of the

race and nationality of the owners. PNGIC had no desire to buy into companies with substantial plantation interests, with one exception which can not be pursued here.

Second, the Australian Government - and for the moment I can not be more precise than this - was opposed to the PNGIC investing in plantations, particularly utilising funds advanced by the Treasury.

Finally, if the plantations were sold by BP to BP(NG), this would only exacerbate the problem which PNGIC was already having in trying to bring about a substantial equity purchase. Even without the plantations, valued by a firm of valuers at around \$6 million but estimated by BP when reserves in plantation companies were included as around \$10 million, BP(NG) was too big and costly a target for the fledgling PNGIC. Contrary to claims made at the time by critics, and repeated later by Donaldson and Turner (see above), the PNGIC could only offer considerably less than BP(NG) shares were valued at. Including plantations in the PNG firm would only make matters worse. For the 1971/72 year, BP(NG) accounts were expected to show a consolidated net profit of \$2.6 million, with shareholders' funds, after payment of an annual dividend of \$750,000, still amounting to paid up capital plus reserves and unappropriated profits of \$20.75 million. That is, the target had to be reduced so the smaller enterprise could take a large enough 'bite' to make the equity transfer worthwhile, and include some PNGIC management control of BP(NG).

It is the third obstacle which was most misunderstood by critics, and which also ensured that Burns Philp's desire for 'insurance' could only come at a hefty price. Making the PNGIC's 'bite' possible involved lengthy negotiations, which are not pursued here. In summary, the outcome required:

(a) BP(NG) to reduce the price of shares to be purchased, from the \$2 valuation per share placed on its shares in May 1972 by the Stamp Duties Commissioner in PNG, to \$1 per share;

(b) a transfer of \$4million from revenue reserves of BP(NG) to BP HO by way of a special dividend, such sum to be lent back to BP(NG) as a loan to be repaid as funds became available;

(c) BP(NG) declaring a further bonus of \$3.5million, payable to BP HO, which

would be utilised to purchase 3.5 million newly issued special \$1 shares in BP(NG); (d) BP HO selling 1.5 million \$1 shares in BP(NG) to the PNGIC, or 12.5% of the issued capital, with the possibility of a further 13.5% being taken up in the near future;

(d) the sale to PNGIC to be made possible by BP HO selling the 1.5 million shares for \$0.5million payable immediately, and the balance payable over three years; (e) PNGIC to pay interest on the outstanding balance of the purchase price at 5.5% per annum, or a fixed interest rate when interest rates were climbing.

In a June 23, 1972 telephone conversation on the outcome of negotiations between BP(NG) managing director Goodsell and BP general manager O'Connor, the former reported a conversation held recently with the (last) PNG Administrator which neatly summed up the company view of the result. Said Goodsell:

*As a matter of interest I had dinner with (Les) Johnson on Tuesday night. ...He said 'We will be paying part of your salary shortly' and I said 'Don't kid yourself, we will be paying part of yours by the way the bargain has gone'.*

O'Connor's response to this report highlighted just how vulnerable the Sydney management was to criticism of the outcome in local financial circles, replying: 'I believe there has been some talking regarding this in Sydney'. The company files show the thought which went into anticipating criticism at the joint BP-PNGIC press conference, held in Sydney on June 27, 1972 to announce the deal, and further illustrate the sensitivity to charges that management had not satisfactorily represented shareholder interests in the negotiations.

## Conclusion

It should now be clear that earlier descriptions of the firm which tried to restore profitability and evade raiders in the late 1960s and early 1970s are flawed, at least regarding its position in PNG during the transition to independence. In particular what has previously been described as a successful negotiation of the uncertainties of decolonization looked considerably different from within the firm. The inability to secure plantations against appropriation and acquisition through a share transfer to the Investment Corporation was only one register of how the firm's management saw the deal as less advantageous than they had initially hoped.

The sceptic can of course say: 'Well, what else would one expect company officials to say!' Certainly the conflicting views held by company officials and radical critics, past and present, are themselves hardly surprising. What is significant is how decolonization in general in PNG, and the case of the PNGIC's equity purchase in particular, reflected a transformation in the firm as well as the conditions in which it operated. The politics of decolonisation included a reduction in the political power of the 'old' international trading firms, including Burns Philp, while the economics of the same moment meant a major transformation in the commercial operations of the company. Burns Philp moved, in PNG and in Australia, from being a firm which had no long-term borrowings and operated on shareholders funds, reserves and profits to a condition of continuous indebtedness. The implications of this shift for its operations in PNG and elsewhere must wait for another time.

1. Mike Donaldson and Deborah Turner, *The Foreign Control of Papua New Guinea's Economy and the Reaction of the Independent State*, Political Economy Occasional Paper No.1, University of Papua New Guinea, 1978; Donaldson and Turner, 1978; Chris Gregory, 'The Emergence of Commodity Production in Papua New Guinea', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* ix, 4 (1979) 389-409; Azeem Amarshi, Ken Good, and Rex Mortimer, *Development and Dependency: the Political Economy of Papua New Guinea*, Melbourne, 1979.
2. Ross Garnaut, 'The Neo-Marxist Paradigm in Papua New Guinea' in R.J. May (ed), 'Social Stratification in Papua New Guinea', Working Paper No.5, Department of Political and Social Change, ANU, 1984, 63-81.
3. cf. Gregory, 'The Emergence of Commodity Production', 395-6; MacWilliam, 'International Companies and Nationalist Politics in Papua New Guinea', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, xvii, 1 (1987).
4. Senate Hansard, 28 July 1977, 1066.
5. Donaldson and Turner, *Foreign Control Over PNG's Economy*, 68.
6. Interviews, 27 September 95 and 1 December 96.
7. MacWilliam, 'International Companies and Nationalist Politics'.
8. 'Foreign Control of Papua New Guinea's Economy', 67.
9. *Students Views & News*, 1, 6, October 1974.

## Mainland and Islands in the Decolonisation of Torres Strait Islanders

Rose Elu, University of Hawai'i

First I would like to thank ANU, and especially Professor Denoon, for giving me this opportunity to speak on Torres Strait Islanders in regard to Decolonisation. My talk will focus specifically on the political struggle for self-determination and self management in the Torres Strait. The main question is: what constitutes colonisation in the case of Torres Strait, for the people and for me in particular? How and how far has there been decolonisation?

I discuss:       the existence of traditional political systems,  
                       non recognition of these political systems,  
                       the introduction of the new political system,  
                       loss of political power and control, and  
                       Torres Strait Islanders' struggle to regain political control.

Before European contact, each of the islands was politically and economically independent. The people on each of the islands practised self determination and self management. Each island was autonomous and independent, each having their own political system, built around *buway*, totems and clans, heads of family, a clan/totem leader, and a *buway* (Kin-group) leader. They also had their own economic systems: self sufficiency was the goal, achieved by horticulture, hunting, gathering, fishing and trade and exchange. They had their own belief systems, involving ancestral spirits, totems, cultism/heroism, magic and sorcery and witchcraft.

They were responsible for their own security and defence, for which purpose each community had its war chief and an army of warriors. They had their own laws, secular and spiritual; they had their own technology in their tools and weapons. They had their own houses and canoes for sea transport.

Each island was responsible for running its own affairs; and there was no common government or overarching political system to unite them. Instead, the communities were meshed by trade links and war alliances. Each island community was self-managed, and people on each island made their own decisions and determined their own future through their own political system.

In 1871, however, with the backing of colonial governments in Australia, the London Missionary Society (LMS) moved in to the region, not only to convert the people to Christianity, but also to pacify or civilise the islanders to make the job easier for the colonial government of Queensland to move in and take control of the islands. This was the first sign of threat to the autonomy of each island, the tradition of political independence, self management and self determination, their economic self-sufficiency, and their power and control over their affairs.

In 1879 the colonial government of Queensland annexed all the islands and moved in to take control of them. In the process they introduced a quite new political system based on Western norms and procedures, appointed leading islanders as 'mamooses' to represent the government locally, and created a system of native police. This intrusion involved the erosion of the islanders' political independence. The traditional political system was either not recognised at all, or else ignored. Traditional leaders were removed from the exercise of power and control, which was centralised in order to regulate the affairs of the whole island group - a radical new concept for the islanders.

Much later, the 'mamooses' were replaced by appointed councillors, though some achieved this position through a form of local election. By this time however, European Government teachers were appointed to each island. These officials formally had total power and control over everything. They taught children and ran the schools, but they also administered the island, imposed and operated a curfew

system, and made decisions and gave orders over the whole field of law and order. This series of innovations meant that islanders were powerless. Therefore they were easily exploited, particularly in the area of wages.

It seems that two significant changes have occurred in recent times.

First has been a general move by Torres Strait Islanders to the South. This has been caused by the collapse of pearling in the early 1960's (which had been the export staple of the region from the late nineteenth century). Meanwhile the population was increasing rapidly, and young men of working age were particularly attracted by the opening up of work opportunities for Islanders on the mainland.

The second great change took place in the sphere of Commonwealth policy through the 1960s, but particularly after the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972. New policy priorities increased the opportunities open to Islanders, and reduced the old restrictions on them, in the Strait as well as on the mainland. This included education opportunities, and control of wage levels. The 1967 referendum, which led to the enfranchisement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, also gave Islanders in the Strait a bit of leverage over the politicians.

At this stage, Islanders were forced to change their life style. They were forced to adopt white values and enter into the cash economy. They were forced to make social and cultural changes in consequence. Many of these changes were enforced by the government's cruel policies of 'protectionism' which subjected people to paternalist controls; the alternating policies of segregation and assimilation, and the integration of Island communities into the Australian mainstream. At the same time, and because of these policies, Islanders suffered enormous injustices in the specific forms of low wages, low standards of education, poor living conditions and consequent health problems, and sub-standard housing. Even though Islanders were aware of these injustices, they had no real political voice to do anything about their situation.

The introduced political system under which they were operating, was carefully controlled by the government. Islanders who were appointed by the government as leaders (i.e. councillors) were afraid to speak out on these injustices, because they might lose their jobs. Those who did try to speak out were labelled radicals and punished.

The day that the government took power and control away from the islanders, is when the political struggle began, in order to regain self- management and self-determination. Even though the government had power and control over the islanders, they did not break the spirit of self determination.

Throughout the colonial period, islanders continuously fought for better wages and conditions, better living standards, improved housing, more education and health facilities, better transport, social benefits, and especially political control to run their own affairs. For example, in 1936 Torres Strait Islanders working on boats demonstrated a real act of self determination by going on strike. It was a maritime strike and the biggest in the history of Torres Strait. The aims of the strike were islanders' control of their own money, better wages and conditions, total control over their own affairs, and relaxation of the cruel rules on the islands, such as the curfew.



## Decolonising Torres Strait: a moderate proposal for 2001

Steve Mullins, Central Queensland University

In December 1992 a delegation from the Islands Co-ordinating Council (ICC), at the time the superior representative body in Torres Strait, met with Gareth Evans and Robert Tickner in Canberra to discuss a self-government proposal. They called for a form of association with Australia similar to that which existed with Norfolk Island. In the following year Getano Lui Jnr., Chair of the ICC, made a number of public statements about the aspirations of Torres Strait Islanders for self-government, most notably in his Boyer lecture, which made the point that there were a number of Australian territories with 'tailor-made' constitutions, and that there was 'no reason why a Torres Strait regional government could not be devised'. He described the suggestion as moderate, and thought that it would be appropriate if it could be achieved in the year 2001, in time for the anniversary of the constitution.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that Torres Strait should be granted some form of political independence has been around for more than twenty years. It was first proposed by the Torres United Party (TUP), established in 1976 by Torres Strait Islanders living in Townsville. In 1978 Carlemo Wacando, a founder of TUP, unsuccessfully brought a High Court action challenging the validity of Queensland's original annexation of the islands, and a number of appeals were made to the United Nations to have Torres Strait placed on the agenda of the Committee on Decolonisation. Although the Australian government was embarrassed by these appeals, especially in view of its stance in the United Nations on New Caledonia, nothing eventuated and TUP fell silent in 1981.

The independence issue resurfaced in 1987, this time advocated by George Mye, a senior member of the ICC and for many years Torres Strait's most prominent political leader. In June Mye cabled delegates to the South Pacific Forum meeting in Samoa, seeking support for Torres Strait independence. In the same year the issue received publicity when it was promoted during festivities to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the first meeting of Torres Strait Councillors. TUP was reactivated, its leaders Wacando and James Akee shifted their activities to Torres Strait proper, and an Independence Working Party was established at Thursday Island. The independence movement was now more broadly based.

In 1989 attention was diverted by the creation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). There were negotiations over the composition of the Torres Strait Regional Council, which rather than being elected in the same way as other ATSIC Regional Councils, came to be composed of members of the ICC, that is the elected Chairs of the 17 Island Councils. The ICC also argued successfully for an Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OTSIA) and an appointed Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board (TSIAB) within ATSIC to look after the needs of the 20000 or so Torres Strait Islanders living outside the Torres Strait region, about 75% of the population. In June 1992 the Murray Island Land Case (the Mabo Case), which confirmed the continuing existence of Native Title on Murray (Mer), again inspired the independence movement, despite the High Court's ruling that sovereignty remained with the Commonwealth. Since then James Akee has declared secession twice: in September 1993 and August 1995.

This chapter considers recent moves towards self-government in Torres Strait. It focuses on the prospects for the 2001 agenda, which despite widespread acceptance both locally and at government level, received a setback when Paul Keating rejected the idea in September 1995. The more ambitious independence movement is also examined, not only because it constitutes a political 'flanking movement' which has kept the attention of the moderate leadership focussed on greater autonomy, but because despite the disgrace of its most prominent leader James Akee (now serving three years for the embezzlement of community funds), some of its policy positions strike a chord

with many Torres Strait Islanders. The paper also briefly examines the role in the de-colonising process of a new Torres Strait political institution, the Council of Elders.

Three imperatives drive both the moderate and the more ambitious self-government agendas: the desire to assert a separate identity, not only separate from white Australia, but more significantly from Aboriginal Australia; the desire to preserve *Ailan Kastom*; and the perceived need for economic independence, for Islanders to break the shackles of welfare colonialism. These are the benefits that Torres Strait Islanders expected to flow from greater autonomy. Dissatisfaction with lagging economic development and a chronically depressed labour market, frustration over the workings of the 1985 Torres Strait Border Treaty, and a lack of influence over the allocation and prioritising of available resources, all find expression in the rhetoric of self-government.

In the Strait itself the economic imperative has been decisive. Thirty years ago Jeremy Beckett noted that Islanders often expressed to him their desire for 'freedom'. Initially he took this simply to mean that they wished to see the removal of the repressive Queensland administration and an end to discriminatory laws. However, on closer inquiry he found that much more was implied, and that the emphasis was principally economic. In the 1950s Torres Strait Islanders wanted the things that other Australians took for granted, but were frustrated by what they perceived to be the obstructive policies of the administration. This frustration found expression in their notion of 'freedom'. Beckett concluded that for the Islanders 'freedom' did not mean 'a disengagement from Australian society, but rather a closer integration, without the mediation of administrators or missionaries'.<sup>2</sup> Obviously much has changed in thirty years, and closer integration with Australia is no longer the only avenue to prosperity. Many Torres Strait Islanders now agree with James Akee, that the legitimate aspirations of their people might be more effectively negotiated across an international boundary.

James Akee's vision for Torres Strait has always been couched in terms of progress, economic development and breaking the grip of welfare colonialism. His supporters are well aware of his corporate and managerial approach. When he visited Thursday Island in November 1992 he declared that he was about 'private enterprise and hard work not hand outs with hardly any direction', and that he would 'move on projects that will make Torres Strait self-sufficient from any government funds'.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is ironic then, that the only significant project secured by Akee's company, Torfish International, was the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) contract with the Muralag Tribal Corporation which caused his downfall in 1996. Nevertheless, it was while working on the CDEP contract that Akee orchestrated the first of his calls for secession, the September 1993 'Declaration of Sovereignty'.

The 'Declaration of Sovereignty' document published in the local newspaper, the *Torres News*, is curious in several ways. Suffice to say that it bore the names of six men representing five island communities, and James Akee as Chair of the Torres United Party. The accompanying statement asserted that the group was in possession of a document signed by Queen Victoria proving that the original annexation of the Islands by Queensland was illegal. The document was never produced, but doubtless it related back to the 1978 case brought against Queensland by Carlemon Wacando, another signatory to the 'Declaration of Sovereignty'. The Torres United Party announced an interim government with James Akee as Prime Minister, and gave the Australian Government 21 days to withdraw its people from the Strait.<sup>4</sup>

As might be expected Akee's 'Declaration of Sovereignty' caused a stir in Torres Strait. Two of the most significant reactions were a notice in the following edition of the *Torres News* by the Erub Council of Elders (COE), and a public meeting at Anzac Park on Thursday Island on 7 October. The Erub Council of Elders (COE) repudiated the 'Declaration of Sovereignty' and emphasised that Erub COE member Dick Pilot, whose name appeared on the Declaration, had acted of his own volition and in no way represented the Erub COE or the community. Indeed, the notice claimed

that Akee had misled Pilot about the use of his name. It also repeated a public statement made by the Chair of the Erub Council that discussions about secession would only commence with James Akee after an amount of \$2 million was placed in each of the Mer (Murray) and Erub (Darnley) Council accounts, and \$0.5 million in the Ugar (Stephen) account. It is fair to assume from this that Akee had spoken to eastern Torres Strait Islander leaders about his plans, and they involved the backing of large-scale financial interests. The Erub COE notice ran for two weeks.<sup>5</sup>

Debate about secession was vigorous throughout October, with letters to the *Torres News* both for and against. Carlemo Wacando, who had identified himself on the Declaration as an Elder Of Ugar, was forced to defend his community standing after it had been called into question by some residents.<sup>6</sup> Wacando had been living on the mainland for many years. Then, on 7 October the meeting at Anzac Park attracted more than 500 people, and proceedings were broadcast live across the Strait on popular TSIMA Radio. Pastor Allan Mosby of the Reconciliation Council was master of ceremonies, and Getano Lui Jnr., George Mye, Dana Ober and James Akee were the main speakers. A telephone poll shortly after the event indicated that 48% of callers were in favour of the more moderate 2001 agenda, 18% supported Akee and 34% were undecided.<sup>7</sup> While firm conclusions should not be drawn from an informal straw poll, it does indicate that in late 1993 there was a reasonable level of support for secession, and the possibility that more might be won.

However, by October 1993 the ICC and the Torres Strait Regional Council had negotiated a new Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) which promised greater autonomy within ATSIC. The prospect of the new TSRA, planned for July 1994, and the fact that Getano Lui Jnr was able to produce at the meeting a letter from Paul Keating received just the week before acknowledging that the Torres Strait Islander desire for autonomy went beyond that which would be achieved by the creation of the TSRA, seemed to ease pressure for any immediate move on sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, by the beginning of 1995 the TSRA's representative structure was being openly criticised, the way in which it allocated funds questioned, and there was a perception that communication with the island communities was poor. In this atmosphere James Akee launched from Cairns his second bid for secession in August 1995. It was couched in the same rhetoric of economic development, this time an Oil and Gas project for Mer (Murray) was part of the package. The bid was more circumscribed however, taking in only Mer, and was made in the name of a third part, the Mer Council of Elders, which appointed an Interim Government with Akee as Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup>

The August 1995 Mer Interim Government caused considerable excitement in the southern press, but in Torres Strait things were more relaxed. There was a sense that Akee's project was doomed, because by then it was common knowledge that he was in danger of prosecution. From at least the middle of 1994 rumours about his embezzlement were circulating in Thursday Island, and in February 1995 Mr Justice Drummond's recommendation that ATSIC should pursue the Muralag Aboriginal and Islander Corporation's missing funds was headlined in the *Torres News*. This time it was essentially a Meriam issue. Mer (Murray) had gone its own way before, most notably when it rejected the Queensland Government's Deed of Grant In Trust scheme in 1986, and the Mabo Decision made it a special and uncertain legal case. Akee acknowledged that the Mer Interim Government did not enjoy majority support in the Strait, but he defiantly stated that 'The Meriam are Zogo people and we will fight our own battles our way and against all adversity we will win'.<sup>10</sup> When the legitimacy of the Mer Council of Elders was publicly called into question, Douglas Bon replied in a similarly pugnacious spirit: it was a legally incorporated institution, and legal action would be taken against anyone who made false statements against it.<sup>11</sup>

The TSRA response was measured. Getano Lui Jnr simply confirmed that the Mer Island Council was still in place and recognised by the State and Federal governments, and funding for services would continue to be provided through it. The TSRA did not recognise the Mer Interim Government, but would not interfere in the affairs of an individual island unless invited to do so by the Island Council. Many of those publicly opposed to Akee were concerned that Mer's

environment was under threat from his promised development projects, and Lui reassured them by making it plain that if the promised oil drilling operation went ahead there would be a strong protest.<sup>12</sup> Letters, mostly condemning the Mer Interim Government, continued to be published in the *Torres News*, but the situation was allowed to drift until Prime Minister Keating visited Thursday Island in September on his way to Papua New Guinea.

A feature common to both the September 1993 and August 1995 bids was James Akee's use of the Councils of Elders as a source of legitimacy, so it is useful to consider this relatively recent innovation in Torres Strait governance. Since colonial times on the outer islands, Island Councils have performed most local government functions, but the councils in their present form are a product of Queensland's *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984*. Councillors are now elected in the same way as other Queensland local councillors, and the Chairs of the 17 Councils so elected form the Island Co-ordinating Council (ICC), until 1994 the senior representative body in Torres Strait. The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) which came into being in July 1994 is a modification of the Torres Strait Regional Council, which had been in place since the creation of ATSIC in 1989. The TSRA has greater autonomy within ATSIC than mainland Regional Councils, and as already mentioned, at the time of its inception was regarded as a transitional step towards some form of provincial status in Torres Strait. The Councils of Elders have as yet no formal status within this government sanctioned representative structure.

The first Council of Elders came into being on Mer, partly in response to the 1992 Mabo Decision, and under the auspices of the Mer Isles Administration, Torres Strait Islander Corporation. At the time of incorporation its objects were to maintain Meriam culture and heritage, land and sea rights, as well as to act as a centre to 'co-ordinate the materials of self-management/ self-determination/ self-sufficiency'.<sup>13</sup> It has a complicated structure with members drawn from Elders of the eight 'tribes' of Mer, people with knowledge of 'Meriam traditional law, culture, genealogy and kinship structure'.<sup>14</sup> The collective cultural knowledge of the Mer Council of Elders helps provide the means to process the negotiations over land that Mabo has made inevitable. There are now many times more people of Meriam descent than there were in pre-colonial times, and Mer is a rather small island with limited available land. Those involved in mediation over land need to be familiar with *Ailan kastom*, and have a good knowledge of family histories. The common practice of island style adoption adds complexity to the authenticating of land claims in Torres Strait, as Eddie Mabo's own case shows.<sup>15</sup> Although there is a formula for how the Mer Council of Elders is composed, selection does not involve a formal electoral process. Each clan negotiates and nominates its own Elders.

There now seem to be informal Councils of Elders on a number of islands. However, in November 1993 the Erub community put to the Commonwealth and Queensland governments a detailed proposal for formally restructuring its community governance, which included a Council of Elders. The Erub proposal, foreshadowed by George Mye in a speech to his fellow ATSIC Commissioners, suggested a Council of Elders which would be a House of Custom and Review. It would 'provide advice and counselling, on request, to individuals and families on land and other custom issues and disputes', and 'review all by-laws passed by the Erub Community Council' in case they conflict with Erubian custom. In this model new by-laws would need Council of Elders approval before being submitted for ministerial assent. The Council of Elders would consist of Erubian men and women over the age of 60, of sound mind, wisdom and experience. The proposal did not stipulate the number of Elders on the Council, or indicate how they would be selected.<sup>16</sup>

In the proposed Erub model, the Council of Elders is more than a bank of traditional cultural knowledge and a point of mediation over land, it is clearly also meant to check the authority and power of the elected Island Council. Mye explained the need for this in his speech to the ATSIC commissioners. He referred to the long-held desire of the Island communities to free themselves of

centralised control, represented in the past by the 'Protector's dictatorial regime', and now by the bureaucracy that had grown up around the ICC. He complained about the lack of meaningful consultation and stressed that decision and policy making were still 'utterly remote' from the island communities. Mye argued that the next step should be towards a regional structure which was a 'voluntary federation of internally sovereign communities'.<sup>17</sup> The Council of Elders adds credibility to the idea of 'internally sovereign' communities because it promises a more self-contained political system, a bi-cameral structure with checks and balances. It also serves as a check on those island councillors who some community members suspect of being too locked into the central system to appreciate that their principal loyalty should be to their home community.

Although the Councils of Elders are outside the state sanctioned structure, many Torres Strait Islanders recognise their legitimacy. They appear to be in harmony with notions of *Ailan Kastom*, which Torres Strait Islanders argue should set the pattern for change. Some younger Islanders, members of the more educated bureaucratic elite for instance, are privately sceptical, questioning whether in traditional Torres Strait society Elders exercised the kind of authority implied in the Erub proposal. In other words, this new institution raises questions about cultural authenticity and the politics of tradition which have been widely debated in other Melanesian contexts.<sup>18</sup> There are also those who are concerned that Councils of Elders might diminish rather than enhance the democratic process. However, the deep respect Torres Strait Islanders have for family Elders works against the public expression of these kinds of reservations.

James Akee looked to Elders, and in the case of the Mer Interim Government to the Mer Council of Elders, for support and legitimation. Having resided on the mainland for many years he understood, as Eddie Mabo had,<sup>19</sup> that to have a real chance of success he needed support from significant Islander families living in the Strait. Being outside the formal representative structures, members of Councils of Elders are not directly accountable to their communities and therefore can tend to be of independent mind. They thus also provide the means for disaffected community members to voice opposition to the elected Island Councillors. Indeed some Elders have themselves been rejected in Island Council elections, and are therefore more or less in open opposition to the Council. The Island Councillors, on the other hand, have a stake in working within the system which provides their funds. It is not surprising then that James Akee could win the support of individual Elders, or that the Mer Council of Elders supported him.

Keating was greeted at Thursday Island with the fanfare, hospitality and open friendliness generally extended to visiting dignitaries. As expected, in his speeches and public meetings with Islander leaders he dismissed Akee's claim for independence, but it took some time to sink in that he was also against any form of provincial status or free association. He signalled his government's readiness to consider separating the TSRA from ATSIC, but 2001 was off the agenda.

The idea of some form of self-government by 2001 had been gathering support in Torres Strait, in Government, and in ATSIC ever since it was flagged by Getano Lui Jnr late in 1992. It had sustained those many Islanders, almost certainly the majority, who wanted greater political and economic autonomy, but who were not interested in severing completely from Australia as James Akee and TUP had proposed since the late 1970s. It had been crucial at the October 1993 Anzac Park meeting.<sup>20</sup> When the TSRA finally came into existence it was generally understood as a step on the way to more complete regional independence,<sup>21</sup> and as late as March 1995 Lui was expressing his appreciation to ATSIC for its support on the issue, calling for a Ministerial Task Force to advance the agenda.<sup>22</sup>

For most of this time Lui was conferring mainly with Robert Tickner, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, who was favourably inclined towards some form of provincial status. However, after the 1993 election Keating created the Office of Indigenous Affairs (OIA) within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to provide an alternative source of policy

advice, a source less close to ATSIC, and OIA opposed the idea. ATSIC and OIA appear often to have been at odds. The explanation for OIA opposition, which proved decisive,<sup>23</sup> was probably signalled by policy analyst W. Sanders in a 1994 discussion paper. Sanders suggested that ATSIC supported the shift from the Torres Strait Region Council to the TSRA, because it was in accordance with its own regionalism policy. The 1993 amendments to the ATSIC legislation reduced the number of Regional Councils, but delegated greater authority to the consolidated Councils. If the TSRA was deemed to be successful it might provide the precedent for other ATSIC regions to seek greater autonomy, and demonstrate to the government that this could result in the more appropriate and cost effective delivery of services. However, Sanders felt that some in ATSIC might be wary of the TSRA proposal, because of the obvious long-term threat to ATSIC itself, that is that like the TSRA more autonomous Regional Councils might seek to leave ATSIC altogether.<sup>24</sup>

The indications are, however, that in mid-1995 ATSIC was supportive of greater Torres Strait autonomy, and once it had conceded that the TSRA should move outside ATSIC there was no reason for it not to support the Getano Lui Jnr's 2001 proposal. But, according to Tickner, the precedent that 2001 might set for other Regional Councils was enough for the OIA to oppose the idea. Although Keating referred in his speeches to the lack of a sustainable regional economy as the reason for his opposition to self-government, the question of precedent was upper-most in his mind. What surprised Tickner was the way in which Torres Strait Islanders accepted this rebuff. In his opinion they conceded too easily. There was no argument, no public expression of anger or even disappointment, and insofar as Keating and OIA were concerned, that was the end of the matter.

In August 1996, however, the new Howard government referred the issue to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, to hand down its recommendations in 1997. The Committee's terms of reference are specific. It is expected to determine whether the people of Torres Strait would benefit from a greater degree of autonomy, if granted what form that autonomy might take, and the implications of regional autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders living beyond the Strait. However, the committee has also been directed to take into account Torres Strait's status as an international border, the possible implications for the Torres Strait environment, and whether greater autonomy would set a precedent for other indigenous groups. In reality, the committee has been asked to weigh the benefits of greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders, against the possible disadvantages for the Australian State.

The TSRA submission to the Committee is representative of all the Torres Strait Islander submissions in arguing that greater autonomy will ensure the maintenance of *Ailan Kastom* and the protection of the Torres Strait environment, and allow for the more effective co-ordination of resource allocation resulting in a better quality of life for Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>25</sup> The Torres Strait Islander submissions also are unanimous that at the very least the TSRA should be made independent of ATSIC. After that there are a variety of suggested models and initiatives. The Mer Island Council goes further than most in proposing a Torres Strait Territory, if not for the whole of Torres Strait, then for the Eastern Islands, but only after thorough consultation.<sup>26</sup> The Erub Island Council suggests that the process should start afresh, and that a new Torres Strait Commission be planned and developed by Torres Strait Islanders using the resources of the TSRA and the Office of Torres Strait Affairs.<sup>27</sup> The Kaurareg Land Council, which has been at odds with the TSRA over the lack of Kaurareg representation on the Authority, recommends a pan-Torres Strait Council of Elders be established to act as an upper house for whatever the equivalent of the TSRA would be in the new order of things.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than suggest a model for future greater autonomy, the TSRA has recommended that the Commonwealth establish a task force to examine the options, and to report in a year. Although all significant stakeholders would be represented on the task force, it would be chaired by the TSRA. This would allow TSRA significant influence over the shape of change, and to manage its introduction. It recommended that the Torres Shire Council immediately be given representation on

the TSRA, for the first time allowing the multicultural residents of Thursday Island township a say in broader regional issues. It also recommended that the Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OTSIA) in ATSIC be given block funds, that the Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board (TSIAB) be allowed to allocate those funds, that the TSIAB be changed from an appointed to an elected body, and that the ATSIC commissioner for the Torres Strait Zone be retained as head of TSIAB.<sup>29</sup>

A number of constituency factors complicate plans for greater Torres Strait Islander autonomy, but for the TSRA precisely how Torres Strait Islanders resident on the mainland should fit into plans is perhaps the most difficult question. As Sanders has pointed out, there has been a subtle shift in the rhetoric of self-government which indicates a growing emphasis on region rather than cultural identity as the focus of autonomy. For the past few years TSRA documents have referred to the 'people of Torres Strait' rather than to 'Torres Strait Islanders'.<sup>30</sup> This is partly to ensure that the multi-cultural population of Thursday Island does not become alienated in the de-colonisation process, but also because the Authority believes that the best chance for self-government will be if it is pursued as a regional issue. Lui has argued before the Standing Committee that the greatest need for improved facilities is in the homelands themselves.<sup>31</sup> Torres Strait Islanders on the mainland enjoy far better access to services, and independent assessments bear this out. Arthur and Taylor put it succinctly in 1994 when they wrote that 'whatever efforts are envisaged to enhance the economic status of Torres Strait Islanders generally, these will need to be doubled for those residing in the Torres Strait Regional Authority area'.<sup>32</sup>

Although relations between Torres Strait Islanders of the homeland and those of the diaspora are sometimes testy, all Torres Strait Islander submissions to the Committee stressed that the Islanders are one people. In fact all submissions, apart from that of the TSRA, recommended that mainland Torres Strait Islanders be included in any plans for greater autonomy. Most suggest a separate commission to be responsible for all Torres Strait Islander affairs, and the Townsville-Thuringowa group, the largest Torres Strait Islander organisation beyond the Strait, detailed a structure which would allow mainland Torres Strait Islanders to participate in the planning for greater autonomy.<sup>33</sup> The TSRA, aware of the practical difficulties this presents, has opted for the more cautious approach outlined above: strengthening the OTSIA and the TSIAB, and locking them into the Torres Strait region by way of the presiding Torres Strait Zone Commissioner. In evidence to the commission Lui described this as a first step towards closer administrative relations, but to go further at present would be to put unbearable pressure on the TSRA's human and financial resources, and perhaps risk greater autonomy for the Torres Strait Region.<sup>34</sup>

The TSRA's cautious approach, which is certainly borne out of a concern about its lack resources and the difficulty of getting more in the current political and economic climate, may also be a response to uncertainty about the future of ATSIC. ATSIC is under siege from above and below, and there is the danger that the agenda for change in Torres Strait might be driven, or overtaken, by the momentum against ATSIC. This could impel the TSRA towards outcomes that have not been thought through. As we have seen, Sanders cautioned in 1994 that Aboriginal Regional Councils might regard a successful autonomous Torres Strait Regional Authority as a precedent for more Regional Councils shifting out of ATSIC. The Coalition Government's rhetoric is bloated with references to directing funds to the 'grass roots', to those 'most in need', and by-passing what has been disparagingly referred to as the 'Aboriginal industry'. While these considerations should not work against the achievement of greater autonomy in Torres Strait, Torres Strait Islanders of the diaspora may be left in a weaker position, as small minorities in autonomous, directly funded Regional Councils. Furthermore, the Commonwealth may move to separate the TSRA from ATSIC too quickly, and the long-term TSRA goal of some form of provincial status, or free association with Australia, will be lost. There appears to be some waning of enthusiasm for self-government in Torres Strait itself, perhaps as a reaction to the Akee secession bids. Ironically perhaps even Akee's own submission to the Committee is unenthusiastic, focussing on the reformation of present structures. It seems therefore, that the TSRA's 2001 agenda has a rough ride ahead, and for

self-government to become reality the TSRA needs to maintain some control over the process. Whether the Commonwealth will agree to establish the Task Force proposed by the TSRA remains to be seen. The situation is in delicate balance.

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3. *Torres News*, 13-19 November 1992.
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5. *Torres News*, 1-7, 7-14 October 1993.
6. Carlemo Wacando to Editor, *Torres News*, 5-11 November 1993.
7. *Torres News*, 15-21 October 1993.
8. P.J. Keating to Getano Lui (Jnr), 30 September 1993, *Torres News*, 15-21 October 1993.
9. *Torres News*, 18-24, 25-31 August 1995.
10. Jim Akee to Editor, *Torres News*, 3-9 November 1995.
11. Douglas Bon to Editor, *Torres News*, 8-14 September 1995.
12. *Torres News*, 25-31 August 1995.
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14. *Ibid.*
15. M. Moynihan, Determination Pursuant to reference of 27 February 1986, by the High Court of Australia to the Supreme Court of Queensland to hear and determine all issues of fact raised by the pleadings, particulars and further particulars in High Court Action B12 of 1982.
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19. J.Beckett, 'The Murray Island Land Case and the problem of cultural continuity', in W.Sanders, *Mabo and Native Title: Origins and Institutional Implications*, CAEPR, 1994, 11.
20. *Torres News*, 15-21 October 1993.
21. Torres Strait Regional Authority, Annual Report for 1994-1995, Thursday Island, 22.
22. *Torres News*, 31 March-6 April 1995.
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24. W. Sanders, 'Reshaping governance in Torres Strait: the Torres Strait Regional Authority and Beyond', CAEPR Discussion Paper, ANU, 1994, 21-22.



25. Torres Strait Regional Authority, Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders, Inquiry into Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders: submissions, Interim Vol.2, Canberra, 1996.
26. Mer Community Council, Enquiry into Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders submissions on behalf of the Meriam people at Mer, in *Ibid*.
27. G.Mye, Chairman, Erub Community Council to Committee Secretary, 7 October 1996, *Ibid*.
28. Kaurareg Land Council, in *Ibid*.
29. Torres Strait Regional Authority, Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders, *Ibid*.
30. Sanders, 'Reshaping governance in Torres Strait', 15-16.
31. Getano Lui (Jnr) to Select Committee, 21 October 1996, Greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders, Proof Hansard Report, 61.
32. W.S. Arthur and J. Taylor, 'The comparative economic status of Torres Strait Islanders in Torres Strait and mainland Australia', CAEPR Discussion Paper, ANU, 1994, 14-15.
33. Townsville-Thuringowa Torres Strait Islander Action Group, Proposals and tentative Agenda for a meeting between concerned Torres Strait Islanders, March 1994, Inquiry into Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders: submissions, Vol.1, Canberra, 1996.
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## Comment on Torres Strait Papers:

Jeremy Beckett, Sydney

I would first like to express my appreciation of the inclusion of the Torres Strait Islanders in this workshop, particularly since they are represented by a Torres Strait Islander scholar, MacRose Elu. Over more than thirty years since I began working among the Islanders I have been frequently disappointed to find them ignored in discussions both of the insular Pacific and of indigenous Australia. Situated within the bounds, though on the margins, of metropolitan Australia, but maintaining a way of life that is more like that of the Pacific Islanders than of the mainland Aborigines, they have tended to slip between the two scholarly domains.

Not only was the culture of the Strait almost continuous with that of their Papuan neighbours, prior to the European presence, but as Steve Mullins shows in his book<sup>1</sup>, the dominant cultural influence during the last quarter of the 19th century came from Pacific Islanders who came as divers and missionaries, and sometimes stayed to marry Torres Strait women. These connection weakened during the 20th century, but because Torres Strait Islanders remained in occupation of their ancestral homes, they were able to carry on a way of life that had much in common with the insular Pacific. They have also tended to compare themselves with the peoples of the Pacific, rather than with mainland Aborigines, and have followed the process of decolonisation there with interest.

From the turn of the century, however, Islanders found themselves subject to the same legal and administrative surveillance as the Queensland Aborigines, and they joined in the protest movement of the 1960s in the hope of throwing off the kinds of irksome restraints that MacRose Elu describes (chapter 16). The civil rights issues of the 1960s gave way in the 1970s to an emphasis on indigenous identity, which tended to separate Aborigines from Torres Strait Islanders and, as Clive Moore's chapter shows (chapter 25), from the descendants of the South Sea Island cane workers. While Torres Strait leaders welcomed the intervention of the Commonwealth Government as a means of pressuring the Queensland Government, they were less comfortable working with pan-indigenous organisations like the National Aboriginal Conference and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. It is ironic that, although the Murray Island Land case led to the overturning of *terra nullius*, Torres Strait leaders had earlier held aloof from the land rights struggle, believing that they already owned the islands where they lived, and they were slow to see the need for the litigation.

The movements for separation from ATSIC, for regional autonomy, and at times, for secession from Australia, which Steve Mullins describes (chapter 17), were informed in greater or less degree by the example of decolonisation in the island Pacific. The model of the Cook Islands, with its guaranteed right of entry to New Zealand, for a while seemed attractive to the moderate leadership of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

The Cook Islands model is not without its ironies. Because of economic stagnation at home, the majority of the Cook Islander population have emigrated to New Zealand, where their status *via-a-vis* the indigenous Maori population remains problematical. For much the same kinds of economic reasons, the majority of Torres Strait Islanders also live on the mainland. While these mainland Islanders remained under the aegis of ATSIC, they were entitled to make claims on the funds it controlled, though they often complained that Aboriginal-dominated organisations denied them their fair share; but with the withdrawal of the TSRA, and prospect of some kind of Regional Autonomy, their right to claim assistance from ATSIC is put in doubt. For its part, the TSRA insists that its resources are fully committed in meeting the special needs of its island dwelling constituency, and that the mainland Islanders, having opted for proximity to standard services and cheap consumer goods, must fend for themselves. The mainlanders, for their part, have demanded representation in the TSR1L.

The TSRA, however, has its own internal rivalries, with the Eastern Islanders complaining that their needs are neglected in favour of other communities, and demanding a less centralised system of government. The Eastern Islanders have long been the radicals of the Strait, and they also make up most of the leadership of Islanders on the mainland; it is not therefore surprising that the two have formed an alliance. Its immediate manifestation has been the lodging of land and sea rights claims, outside the framework of the TSRA. The role of expatriates in domestic politics, with their freedom from community pressures, their access to various kinds of expertise as well as the media, is of course familiar to anyone working in the post-colonial Pacific.

1. Steve Mullins, *Torres Strait: a history of colonial occupation and culture contact, 1864-1897*, Rockhampton, 1995.

## Government Irreverence in Australian Indigenous Affairs: Colonialism, Imperialism and Culture

Christine Fletcher, North Australian Research Unit, ANU

Democracy is linked to the relationship between social capital and civic trust. Many of the fundamental democratic values at the core of Australia's parliamentary institutions were brought here during European settlement, but they only applied to newcomers, not the Aborigines. Solidarity among the colonial workers in the 19th century, the emergence of capital and federation in 1901 further entrenched those values. It is clear by the way that institutions have been established and, more recently, by the national debates over race and culture, that recognition of social capital in Australia is associated more with the non-indigenous than with the indigenous population. This lies at the heart of relations between black and white Australians. This paper aims to explain some of the root causes of this unbalanced relationship by illustrating how Australian colonists reinforced their settlement of the continent by constructing a civil society which had strong ties to the origins of the settlers.

Australia has constantly attempted to reassure itself of what Said describes as 'the superlative values of white (ie English) civilisation'.<sup>1</sup> These values are reflected in past immigration policies and, so far as Aboriginal society is concerned, the same values were reinforced in the post-colonial period by government through the period of attempted assimilation. Assimilation was accompanied by the doctrine of *terra nullius*, meaning 'vacant land', the official response to Aboriginal claims to land. Until recently, governments pretended that Australia was virtually uninhabited before 1788. Governments accepted that Aborigines were here, but the official view was that, since there was no indication of farming or sedentary practices, the land was vacant.

Such attitudes eroded Aboriginal culture, downgrading their legitimacy in system and shifting the focus away from the problems they faced. Other policies, notably the national referendum in 1967, considered a milestone in black and white relations, were intended to stem the damage caused to the Aborigines, but governments remain reluctant to concede any form of compensation for the traumas caused by the earlier policies. Aside from the Redfern Speech by Prime Minister Keating in 1992, in which he acknowledged for the first time the atrocities committed against Aboriginal people, Australia has never apologised for the past. A recent example of this reluctance to compromise was voiced by the Prime Minister, John Howard, in 1996. The following extract was taken from an interview on the question of growing racism, particularly against Aboriginal people. In an interview with John Laws on national radio, Mr Howard said:

*I sympathise fundamentally with Australians who are insulted when they are told that we have a racist bigoted past. And Australians are told that quite regularly. Our children are taught that. Some of the school curricula go close to teaching children that we have a racist bigoted past. Now, of course, we treated Aborigines very, very badly in the past - very, very badly - but to tell children whose parents were no part of that maltreatment, to tell children who themselves have been no part of it, that we're all part of a, sort of, a racist bigoted history, is something that Australians reject.<sup>2</sup>*

Aborigines have typically received a bad press through generalisations. Anecdotes contribute to the characterisation of Aborigines in relation to welfare, for example.<sup>3</sup>

### The Indigenous people

The philosophical basis of Aboriginal culture is among the most ancient on earth. According to United Nations Special Rapporteur Jose R Martinez Cob, indigenous societies are distinguished from others by their 'pre-invasion and pre-colonial' characteristics.<sup>4</sup> Langton, an Aboriginal scholar, writes:

*Before contact, there were Yolngu, Pitjantjatjara, Warlpiri, Waka Waka, Guugu Yimidhirr, or whatever the 'Gadigal' or 'Eora' actually call themselves, and so on ... Guugu Yimidhirr began to see whites only in terms of an identifiable and different group rather than random individuals one hundred years after contact when the effect of colonisation had proved so consistently brutal and devastating.<sup>5</sup>*

Aborigines are a minority in the Australian population but in some areas the numbers are substantial, and birth rates are increasing - by the year 2000, the indigenous population may reach 300,000. Presently, they number around 280,000 in a population of 18 million. Before the first British settlers in the 1770s that population was thought to number between 500,000 and one million.<sup>6</sup>

The needs of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were accommodated in their own system of law - as Bonner asserts, there was 'no administrative class in the European sense' <sup>7</sup> no institutions even vaguely resembled western style structures. Some insight into the values of Aboriginal society can be found in anthropological research and, more recently, from the works of historians such as Henry Reynolds and others but insight into Aboriginal culture comes from revelations by indigenous people themselves.

From a governance perspective, the cultural differences between the two societies appear to be deeply embedded in their separate histories of ideas. For example, western society puts a value on property which some observers believe is the absolute basis for the permanent transition to colonisation, particularly in countries such as the United States and Australia, where settler populations dispossessed the indigenous populations and almost completely disempowered them.<sup>8</sup>

### **Social control by the colonials**

Understanding western society - and civil society - is as much a part of the puzzle of the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians as recognising that Aboriginal people have special rights. Western values almost entirely overwhelmed the Aboriginal people - particularly property and the networking of community-driven associations which were thriving by late 19th century. The emergence of unions, groups, parties, organisations, associations and corporations strengthened the development of civil society and further marginalised the indigenous population.<sup>9</sup> Networks of civil structures which formed in all of the colonies became a major influence on the direction of social and political development in Australia.<sup>10</sup> According to Walzer, each country has its peculiar political values which, in combination with democratic institutions, keep churning out the recipe for that particular type of civil society.<sup>11</sup> Arguably, civil society in Australia is democratically organised through the freedoms and rights of association notably in areas of unions, clubs, parties, groups, and whatever else non-government activity people might choose to engage in. Martin Krygier in a recent portrayal said:

*In modern conditions, one large element of public decency is civility ... Australia exemplifies, imperfectly but well, the practical ideal of civil society - ideal, because it can serve as a normative standard, though it cannot be perfectly realised anywhere; practical, because it has been realised to a considerable degree in certain places and times, among them here and now...*

*Like any society, ours is not without incivilities, the deepest of which have occurred to the aboriginal population.<sup>12</sup>*

Australian civil society evolved alongside colonial land acquisitions and postwar soldier settlement reward systems. Institutions such as the unions, for example, became bastions of the principles of free association. The Amalgamated Shearers Union, united under the Australian Labour Federation, and others contributed, along with churches and other organisations, to the transformation to social democracy and the emergence of the mass party movement, a process which was integral to colonial maturity and to Australia's transformation into a federation.<sup>13</sup>

Understanding the philosophy of civil society and free association helps to explain why western society still attempts to squander indigenous cultural values - particularly native title claims to land. Australia's relatively stable political conditions encouraged the freedoms that support multiculturalism and one would expect these values to alter the predominance of Anglo-Celtic traditions on civil society. From

most accounts, the different cultural values brought to Australia by post war immigrants were to be regulated within the wider community by the values of Australian democracy but the core institutions which provide the framework for social values (and property values) remain grounded in British and European tradition. Oddly, the values that foster tolerance derive from the same set of principles. According to Birrell,

*the immigration programs of earlier years laid the foundations of an ethnic movement which has since shaped Government cultural and immigration policies...to this end it provided funds for ethnic languages and cultures, including ethnic TV and radio, as well as ethnic specific welfare services<sup>14</sup>*

Where did the Aboriginal population fit? Australia's celebration of diversity took place *after* the *White Australia Policy* was abandoned. The *White Australia Policy* is an indicator of the type of society that Australia had become - mainly white, British, and western. The indigenous people were at their most vulnerable in that period, when governments were taking Aboriginal children away from their families and attempting to assimilate them into white society, and convince them to discard their beliefs and embrace Anglo-Celtic values. Possibly, these factors combined to create an ideal political climate for governments to introduce their Aboriginal assimilation policies.

### **Land as the basis for survival**

The colonial military and marine establishment, followed by ex-convicts, became the first non-indigenous landholding class, modifying British common law to suit their needs. At each point of settlement around the coast, whites chose the most fertile lands and brought their Anglo-Celtic inheritance to the task of developing infrastructure and securing their property claims. Aborigines were pushed off their lands and away from their ancestral country. By the 20th century, the six colonies had reached agreement over federation and, with the creation of the Commonwealth, all land, whether gazetted under specific legislation or held in trust, fell within the jurisdiction of the Crown. The desire for land in Australia became the motivating factor in what Else-Mitchell calls 'the development of a nation and an influence on the disposition of the population across the continent':

*How the land, which for many centuries before had been occupied by the aboriginal races and identified with their cultures and religions, could be exploited in this fashion is itself a paradox. But it was the product of a curiously devised principle of British colonial law which established the territorial sovereignty of the Crown and laid the foundations of our systems of land disposal and tenure.<sup>15</sup>*

The ancient jurisdictions that existed before white settlement remained in place but the boundaries of leaseholds and settlements began to layer and undermine the Aboriginal jurisdictions. From a colonial perspective, Aboriginal land was crowded out by British property laws. Indigenous jurisdictions are comprised of more than territorial occupation - jurisdictions are a complex of territorial lands governed by other universal and community factors, such as social, economic, cultural and political relations. Since white settlement, the complications of multiple jurisdictions have been compounded by political circumstances and by state borders.

Because Aborigines were dispossessed, they had little hold over what was happening to them - they had virtually no connection with the system in which they were trapped. Problems were compounded by the government's official policy of *terra nullius* - an idea adopted by Australian governments which, to avoid conceding benefits of land ownership to Aborigines, held the line of occupation of Australia at 1788 - *terra nullius* was reinforced by a decision, low on the scorecard of judicial ethics, by Justice Blackburn in 1971. Two decades after the Blackburn decision, the High Court brought down the Mabo judgement in 1992 which seemed finally to signal a renaissance of Aboriginal political power and a perception that structures between black and white Australia had begun to mesh in the form of reconciliation. Yet political dialogue between indigenous peoples within the states and territories remains impoverished<sup>16</sup>. The Commonwealth *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* was a huge leap forward, relaxing the rigid land regulations that, for political and economic reasons, had resulted in all land being tied up for use exclusively through non-indigenous transactions.

*The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and the recent *Native Title Act 1993*, are

bench marks for Aboriginal progress in the overall system of land tenure. But, it would be misleading to say that this represents a form of decolonisation. Aboriginal land tenure, ownership and rights provides an addition to, and perhaps, a form of opposition to, the institutions of colonialism but such institutions have global economic imperatives built into their roots, making it difficult to concede that there are zero-based relationships going on between indigenous societies and non-indigenous governments. From the very beginning of white settlement, land was regulated by the colonial governments. Allocation of land became a function of governments, whether or not Aborigines lived on the land. In fact, once the early settlers had decided on building a dwelling, they viewed Aborigines as a dangerous nuisance and a threat to their newly acquired property.

### **Colonial Imperialism, public administration and public policy**

Colonialism in Australia has been characterised by a form of cultural imperialism. First, there is a type of imperialism which was imported - carried over from the British/European inheritance and reflected in attitudes towards indigenous societies. This refers to the treatment of Aboriginal people over the past two centuries and to their exclusion from our governing institutions. The second type of imperialism is that raised by Said in his analysis of British literature:<sup>17</sup> for example, Dickens represented British colonialism in *Great Expectations* as unleavened and unattractive, an imperial culture engineered by the peculiar behaviour of low classes. In other words, people who freely chose to become colonials compromised their British cultural inheritance. Hughes, the Australian expatriate and republican, refers to this relationship as a form of social apartheid.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, offshoots of this monoculturalism emerged in a most virulent form through the practice of assimilation policies - seemingly a contradiction in rhetorical terms. In reality, assimilation sprang from the urge to take Aborigines away from their traditional way of life, quarantine them in a cultural vacuum (institutions) and re-educate them in the ways of western civilisation - how to hold a knife and fork, sit on chairs, wear shoes, live in houses, enter the work force and, eventually, produce pale skinned children. Assimilation was intended to overcome the weakness in non-Aboriginal human behaviour in which a community finds itself in a punitive mode perhaps because of frustration at not understanding its own peculiar colonial values. In his critique of imperialism and culture, for example, Said concludes that:

*bringing civilisation to primitive or barbaric peoples (had) the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when 'they' misbehaved or became rebellious, because 'they' mainly understood force or violence best; 'they' were not like 'us', and for that reason deserved to be ruled<sup>19</sup>*

Some people subscribe to this philosophy even today, indeed, as the shades are drawn on the 20th century, Australia seems to be emerging from a stable period of social justice into a dark phase of public racism and monoculturalism. The system of government leaves little room for indigenous philosophies to be taken into account, at least in day to day relationships between administration and society. Attempts to reform public administration have produced mixed results - success has been dogged by the historical lack of substantial organic relationships between the indigenous peoples and non-indigenous society. The following section suggests how this has influenced the development of public administration - a key link between government and indigenous peoples.

### **Gains and Losses**

Almost all the positive changes in Aboriginal affairs are linked to the reforms initiated as a result of the 1967 Commonwealth referendum. The most obvious gains occurred through legislation - changes to land tenure systems (leaseholds, land rights), local government structures, anti-discrimination legislation - and reform in the Commonwealth and state bureaucracies, government expenditure, and in judicial decisions (Mabo and Native Title). But as a colleague recently observed: only when there is a change of government and we face hard times can the gains of the past be truly measured. In Aboriginal affairs, when policies become obscured by reforms and when financial support is considerably diminished, that is when the gains made by the indigenous people of Australia over the last decade or so will become clear. During the Hawke and Keating administrations the indigenous peoples made some advances towards self-determination across various policy areas. However, following the Howard government's election to office in March 1996, the policy fortunes of the indigenous population plunged.

A large portion of the legislative reforms that have taken place fall under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth government: for example, the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1975*, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and the *Native Title Act 1993*. Where jurisdictions are shared, state Acts run parallel to Commonwealth legislation but under the Constitution, the Commonwealth has the power to override concurrent state legislation. Also, the shift towards the Commonwealth that occurred after the 1967 referendum was motivated by the historical neglect by state governments of their Aboriginal constituents. Thirty years after the referendum there is little institutional recognition of Aboriginal rights and virtually no constitutional protection. Apart from legislation (which can be changed at any time) there is no special protection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their health and well-being remains at a level experienced by people in the third world.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, cultural imperialism against Aborigines was confined to dark corners of the nation's mind, contained by social and political attitudes that were vigorously promoted through strategies for social and administrative reform. The question of whether or not improvements experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples under the Keating administration would survive a change of regime was not an obvious consideration - the indigenous people themselves had lobbied relentlessly for change during this period. Policy reforms do not offer any long term security. Indeed, it is not unrealistic to assume that, in the case of social and political reform, unless society builds on the foundations of legislative change, then it is possible that the life of the reforms might only last as long as the life of the government in office. The philosophy of cultural and social diversity that prevailed under the Keating administration was thrown into confusion by the Howard government and by some politicians who have set out to weaken the political profile of the indigenous community.

Most discussions between governments and the Aboriginal peoples about what sort of governmental structure might be the most suitable for providing access and service to indigenous societies have been *ad hoc*. There has been a lot of debate on the early days of government attempts to engage in dialogue with Aboriginal people, particularly in the 1970s when the NACC and NAC were formed and then abandoned.<sup>20</sup> But, except for relationships between indigenous communities and the resource industry, dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal policy-makers is often carried out on the edge of crises or policy failures. Generally, there little attention is devoted to the question of what type of strategic negotiating framework might be the most suitable.

The significance of constructing policy frameworks between indigenous communities and governments has been recognised at a local level in policy area such as local government, and in transfer of payments from commonwealth to state and local governments. However, in substantive terms, there has never been any systematic approach to these issues. Health issues, housing policies, lack of infrastructure and, recently, problems of substance abuse, are treated in isolation - responses vary from 'bring in the army' though to setting up a health clinic - rather than as symptomatic of other, colonial-style, circumstances in which some indigenous communities remain trapped.<sup>21</sup>

### **Self-determination and government**

Self-determination was popularised as a principle for reinstating freedom in countries which were colonised and in Australia, self-determination became the key to Aboriginal solidarity and a potential means of achieving empowerment and an improved quality of life. It remains that way today because self-determination has never truly been realised in the sense that the Aboriginal people have never gained self-governing autonomy - there have been gains at a local government level but the outcomes are only as strong as the commitment of the legislators. Aborigines are no longer the objects of assimilation but as people with special rights, they remain economically and politically vulnerable.<sup>22</sup>

Self-determination was always the principle for reform. It was used to sweep away the trappings of assimilation and, as an administrative principle, it was linked closely to decentralisation - an attempt to move away from strong central control. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), which first appeared in the early 1970s, did not exactly embody self-determination but it was the first serious attempt to support indigenous community development in remote areas. DAA was the first national organisation to liaise with the states, territories and local governments and with other commonwealth agencies. But there were no provisions to include Aboriginal people in the decision-making process nor any way that they could have their say in community development. This is a large part of the



explanation why DAA became redundant in the late 80s to be replaced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). ATSIC inherited the administrative side of DAA and, along with it, an Aboriginal constituency which had begun the long haul back to reclaiming land and culture. By the end of the 1980s, various types of Aboriginal land rights legislation had been passed by the Commonwealth Parliament, and in the Parliaments of New South Wales and South Australia and there were special Aboriginal community governance provisions in some states.<sup>23</sup>

ATSIC was designed to be different from other government departments. Its primary aim was to lever government resources quickly and directly into areas where they were most needed - at the community level. The way through to this was seen to lie in the design of the organisation itself which explains why it was created as a peculiar form of administrative democracy. As we now know, for ATSIC to serve its Aboriginal constituents, it was forced to challenge the integrity of its own accountability principles and, for many people outside of the organisation, that was seen as unacceptable. Members of its own Aboriginal constituency had a conflicting view of accountability and ATSIC, targeted for being different, has had to bear its burden publicly. Moreover, as Aboriginal society advanced its own cultural strengths, ATSIC's skills in resolving differences increasingly became seen as political. Also governments meticulously avoided discussions of divided sovereignty, even as a principle, or in its most basic local governmental form.<sup>24</sup> From an administrative point of view, this added a touch of superficiality to any long term delivery of self-determination.

### Concluding comments

Decolonisation is not necessarily followed by the reinstatement of land to the indigenous population. Moreover, how do we measure democracy for Aboriginal people? The United Nations mandate of self-determination was simply a guide rather than a rule. Assimilation had trapped Aborigines in a system that was completely foreign. Assimilation was leveraged out of the system by the introduction of self-determination, but ironically assimilation was operating in Australia in the post-war period at the same time that Australia was lobbying the United Nations to free its near neighbours in Southeast Asia from the shackles of European colonisation. By that time, civil society bore the hallmarks of the non-indigenous society.

Colonialism has many forms. In keeping with the type of societies in the Asia/Pacific region, and in Africa, colonisation was an inheritance of foreign occupation - usually by Europeans. However, in international parlance, colonial governments mostly packed up the resources of the country that they occupied and departed for their own homelands (with the notable exception of the French in the Pacific region and, until the mid 1970s, the Australians in PNG). Australia became a colony of the British Empire in 1788 and by the 20th century it wielded *de facto* colonial powers in Papua New Guinea and against the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. Colonialism remains part of Australia's constitutional ties to the British Parliament and in government attitudes towards the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Debates over the value of social capital have, for the moment, been captured by racist rhetoric. When racism abates, is when the losses faced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders - the flaws in our institutional structures and cultures - will become most apparent.

1. Edward W.Said, 1994, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, 1994, 101.
2. Transcript, 24 October 1996, provided by the *Sydney Morning Herald*.
3. Similar problems plague minorities elsewhere: Sowell refers to this as the dogma of 'stereotypes' and cites examples of the Koreans in the United States. Koreans became noticeable only when they began to concentrate in particular sorts of retail stores. Germans became known as piano makers, Italians as fruit shop owners, and the Vietnamese as restaurant owners and so on. Cultural advantages in some areas sometimes pass unnoticed, or are overlooked. Thomas Sowell, 1994, *Race and Culture: a World View*, Harper Collins, 1994.
4. Jose R. Martinez-Cob, Study of the Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations, UN Document, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/7/Add.4, 1986, paragraphs 378-80.

5. Marcia Langton, 1993. 'Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television...', An Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal peoples and things, Australian Film Commission, North Sydney, 1993.
6. Christine Fletcher, 'Trapped in Civil Society: Aborigines and Federalism in Australia', *Discussion Paper 4/1996*, North Australia Research Unit (Australian National University).
7. Neville Bonner, 'Always Anangu: A review of the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal Communities in Central Australia', Report for Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1988, 20
8. Daniel J. Elazar, Foreword, in Vincent Ostrom, *The Political Theory of a Compound Republic: Designing the American Experiment*, 2nd Edition, University of Nebraska Press, 1987.
9. Martin Krygier, 'The Sources of Civil Society', Second Richard Krygier Memorial Lecture, Melbourne August 29, 1996, Radio National Transcripts, Background Briefing, 15 September 1996; Anthony Milner and Mary Quilty (eds), *Australia in Asia: Comparing Cultures*, Melbourne, 1996; Adam Przeworski *et al* , *Sustainable Democracy*, Melbourne, 1995.
10. Eva Cox, A Truly Civil Society, Boyer Lectures, ABC, Sydney, 1995.
11. Michael Walzer, 'The Civil Society Argument', in R. Beiner (ed), *Theorizing Citizenship*, Albany, 1995.
12. Krygier, 'The Sources of Civil Society'.
13. R.A. Gollan, 'Nationalism, the Labour Movement and the Commonwealth', in G. Greenwood (ed), *Australia: A Social and Political History*, London, 1955; W.K. Hancock, *Australia*, Brisbane, 1961.
14. Robert Birrell, Robert, 'The Dynamics of Multiculturalism in Australia', in D. Lovell et al (eds) *The Australian Political System*, Melbourne, 1995, 634-5
15. Else-Mitchell, 'Territorial Conquest - Phillip and afterwards', *Victorian Historical Journal* , 46 (3) (1975), 429-446.
16. Sally Weaver, 'Australian Aboriginal Policy: Aboriginal Pressure Groups or Government Advisory Bodies?' *Oceania*, 54 (1), 85-108 (1983) for Aboriginal organisations in the 1970s and 80s.
17. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.
18. Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding*, New York, 1987.
19. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xi.
20. Weaver, 'Australian Aboriginal Policy'.
21. Fletcher, 'Trapped in Civil Society'.
22. Mick Dodson suggests that anyone who doubts the devastation wreaked by the assimilation period should read the submissions to the public hearings into the Stolen Generation in 1996. Michael Dodson, 'Assimilation Versus Self Determination: No Contest', The H. C.(Nugget) Coombs Northern Australia Inaugural Lecture, Discussion Paper No. 1/1966, North Australia Research Unit, ANU.
23. Christine Fletcher, 'Altered States: Federalism, Sovereignty and Self-Government', Discussion Paper 22, Federalism Research Centre, ANU, 1992.
24. Christine Fletcher, 'Aboriginal Non Democracy: A Case for Aboriginal Self-Government and Responsive Administration', Discussion Paper 23, North Australia Research Unit ANU, 1994.

## The Return of the Kiap: recolonising rural Papua New Guinea

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*Australia has used the people of New Guinea well, historically speaking, and it is the hope of all Australians in New Guinea that when self-government does come, there will still be a place for us.* James Sinclair, ex-kiap.<sup>1</sup>

The Patrol Officer or *kiap* was the face of government in most of colonial Papua and New Guinea. Due to the limited and peculiar nature of Australian colonialism,<sup>2</sup> kiaps were vested with a remarkable concentration of powers. To communities remote from the burgeoning bureaucracy in Port Moresby, kiaps were effectively 'the government' and appeared to hold the keys to modernisation and advancement. With the rapid shift to self-government in 1973 and Independence in 1975 large numbers of these kiaps (and other officers) left the service and, in many cases, the country. Independence also marked another step in the decline of the kiap model of government, a process which began with the increasing specialisation of public servants posted to rural areas.<sup>3</sup> Patrol officers (still often referred to as kiaps) continue to exist today, although their powers are a fraction of what they were at the height of the colonial period.

One of the ironies of contemporary Papua New Guinea is that the Australian kiap, the ultimate icon of colonial rule, has reappeared as the visible face of the mineral resource industry. Former kiaps (and other ex-colonial officers) now fill most of the expatriate positions within the mining companies which are concerned with Community Affairs/ Relations/ Development. The irony is particularly apparent in the light of recent charges that the dominance of Australian companies in the minerals sector mirrors the extension of Australian metropolitan control during the colonial era, albeit without the responsibilities of the latter. Weiner, writing in reference to ex-kiaps in the oil industry, argues that this practice is 'neo-colonialism', as 'in the use of ex-colonial officers, the company is effectively reproducing its dominant and unconscious colonial attitude towards village peoples of the tropical world.'<sup>4</sup>

This 'recolonisation' of rural Papua New Guinea by the kiap raises a number of issues. How do 'born-again' kiaps conceive of their current roles, and how do they compare with their former roles? What are the implications of this recolonisation for rural communities? Why has the colonial kiap been such a useful model for resource companies? How are the roles of these kiaps perceived and contrasted by rural communities? Here we provide an initial exploration, after describing the key features of the kiap model of government, and the political and social environment which has enabled their return.

### Kiaps in the Colonial Order

From the 1930s, kiaps formed the basis of colonial administration in rural Papua and New Guinea. Hubert Murray, Governor of Papua for over thirty years, had ensured a lasting role for expatriates in the operation of the government apparatus by pursuing a paternalistic framework for governance in which 'Indigenous societies or leaders per se had no functional place'.<sup>5</sup> This was in marked contrast to British and French theories of colonial administration. Expatriate kiaps and District officers were central components of the administrative framework.

The roles of the kiap were numerous and varied. The most romantic, of course, was the patrol into un-contacted areas. This initial contact and exploration function aimed, nominally at least, at extending the scope of administration authority, gave rise to legendary accounts of hardship and endurance, painting an image of the kiap as rugged and individualistic. More commonly routine patrolling was carried out episodically to remind areas on the periphery of the colonial state of the authority of the administration: to

make 'the connection between a modest outpost and a mighty empire'.<sup>6</sup> Much of the administration effort was focussed on pacification - ending the tribal fighting that was endemic in many areas. Kiaps operated with Papua New Guinean policemen, and had the power to hold hearings, deliver verdicts and sentences, and to imprison offenders. In this role, kiaps were remarkably successful, at least in the Highlands. This was largely, Gordon argues, because they tended to let the parties resolve disputes themselves: 'Kiaps had a basic anthropological training; enough to realise that matters or disputes were more complex than they appear on the surface, and thus should be left alone.'<sup>7</sup>

There was a final frantic burst of patrolling just prior to self-government in 1973 and Independence in 1975 focussed on election education and the compilation of electoral rolls. In a sense this established an unsustainable level of government activity in rural areas, a level with which the activities of the Independent government would always be compared unfavourably by rural communities.

Of course, not all kiap activity was benign: coercion and force were central to the power that kiaps exerted. Armed police gave patrols and kiaps more than adequate firepower to back up the force of law. Polier argues that in places, demonstration created 'fear in local subjects', and by this means 'local forms of violence were replaced by new state-sanctioned forms'.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to their role in law and order, kiaps were 'one-stop' government agents. Within their local sphere of influence they controlled labour recruitment, health and education service delivery, road and airstrip construction, local government councils, and the minutiae of daily administration. In this 'generalist' role as providers of all things, kiaps were the strategic keyholders to modernity for these rural communities. One older Enga cited by Gordon stated that 'the first kiaps gave beads, salt, steel axes - everyone wanted these things so they all followed the kiap and stopped fighting. We stopped fighting because the kiap told us to and obeyed because we did not want to lose the source of these things.'<sup>9</sup>

One final aspect of the kiap in the colonial order was a focus on the kiap as a 'practical man of action'.<sup>10</sup> They were expected to maintain and control all aspects of their Patrol post (often going for extended periods without seeing another government officer other than their police) and to patrol as regularly as possible: 'the field is the real theatre of administration' according to the 1970 *Standing Instructions*. Although patrol reports had to be written and submitted (according to strict guidelines, especially in terms of promptness), the kiap was not a policy maker or paper administrator.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, kiaps were merely implementing policy dictated from Australia, albeit through Port Moresby, rather than being involved in developing plans for local-scale development.

### **Mining and Governance**

Administration revenue from mining was critical to the extension and functioning of the New Guinea administration from 1926 to 1940.<sup>12</sup> Revenue from the Bulolo dredges allowed the Administration to increase its reach into peripheral parts of the colony. Airstrips and roads were constructed at an increasing rate, agricultural extension blossomed, and spending on 'District Services' - the grassroots of administration - increased dramatically between 1926/7 and 1939/40.

However, at other times, and most particularly from the late 1980s, state revenues from mining appear to have played a limited role in maintaining or extending state control over rural areas. The much documented recent decline in the 'reach' of the state<sup>13</sup> sits oddly with the boom in government revenues from the sector, particularly in the 1990s. This indicates the significance of state infrastructures and technologies in translating the benefits of mineral resources into state control and development. In particular, the daily contact that kiaps had with the local populace, and the ability of the one government agent to both enforce the law and provide access to the wealth of the unseen government appears to be an element in contemporary government services which is lacking.

In the virtual absence of the state, the resource projects have become a focus for local interests and aspirations. This trend has been exacerbated by the remote peripheral parts of Papua New Guinea in which the mines have been located. They have essentially become 'opportunity enclaves' in a sea of political, social and economic unrest and decline. In this way they have emerged as 'mini-states' in the province, or even region, in which they operate. This role is reinforced by schemes such as the Tax Credit Scheme, which allows the developer to provide public infrastructure (roads, schools, aid posts etc) within the province and receive a 100 per cent tax credit for this expenditure from the national government. Companies routinely provide a range of social (youth and women) and economic (business development) services to the communities in which they locate; they have come to mirror the activities conventionally associated with governments. In charge of many of these activities and programs are recycled Australian kiaps, usually recruited by colleagues who have already made the transition.

### **Kiaps in the Mining Industry**

There are many precedents for shuffling between government posts and private mining in Papua New Guinea. One of the earliest and most successful to make the switch was Cecil Levien. He switched from being District Officer at Morobe in 1922, to become a major player in developing the Wau-Bulolo field in the late 1920s. In the early 1930s the Leahy brothers worked closely with Jim Taylor, patrol officer *par excellence*, during their exploration of the Wahgi valley. Jack Hides, Jim Taylor and John Black, each involved in long exploratory patrols, routinely panned for gold in the rivers they crossed. In 1948 a poorly informed scramble for leases at Porgera saw John Black and two others quit administration posts to participate. Jim Taylor followed suit several years later, and among his varied interests was a gold lease at Porgera which he retained until the mid-1970s. This trend continued until the end of the colonial regime: in 1973, the Porgera kiap, Jack Scott, switched to working for the mineral exploration company at Porgera.

The 1980s minerals boom which saw the development of the Ok Tedi, Misima, Porgera, and Mt Kare mines saw the widespread recruitment of ex-kiaps by resource developers, classically to Community Relations. Initially much of their work involved the negotiation of land access and compensation issues, but as the operations matured (with the notable exception of Mt Kare, on which more below) the scope of their activities, and their numbers, increased.

Without a comprehensive survey, we know of over 25 ex-Administration personnel who occupy or have occupied most of the key community liaison positions in the industry. They are distributed throughout the major mines and prospects, including Porgera (13 individuals at one time or another), Lihir (6), Misima (2), Ok Tedi (2), and Kutubu (3). At Porgera, half of the ten expatriate Community Affairs staff currently employed are ex-Administration personnel, including the manager, along with the Port Moresby-based Corporate Affairs manager. In many cases, but by no means all, they have returned to areas in which they operated as kiaps. When further staff are required, they often recruit through networks of former colleagues.

Many tasks which confront community liaison staff are strikingly familiar to those who were kiaps. They become embroiled in mediating in disputes, overseeing compensation payments, determining land ownership and group membership, censusing, and as mediators in labour relations. Today, however, they rarely go on patrol. Instead, visits to communities are made by vehicle where roads exist, or by helicopter. A frequent complaint by communities is that where the kiaps of old would sleep in the villages while on patrol and were more accessible, helicopter visits tend to be brief and allow less contact, particularly in dispersed communities. Partly this is a function of age: a returning Porgera kiap tried to repeat a patrol he had made 23 years earlier and discovered that, like state capacity, the years had not treated his body kindly. It also reflects the differing nature of their employers - instead of being the mobile agents of a thinly spread administration, they now operate for a highly centralised and locally focussed corporation.

In one critical regard, the positions they now occupy put them, in the communities' eyes, in the same place

that they occupied under the colonial regime. With access to senior corporate management, and with control over matters such as business contracts and the discretion to spread community funding, these ex-kiaps are again seen to be the gatekeepers to modernity and wealth.

Crucially, even where Community Relations people are not ex-kiaps, it is a 'kiap model', focussed on the daily management of the local environment, that is instituted. In many cases they employ as assistants and colleagues, Papua New Guineans who worked under them during the colonial period. The weaknesses of the kiap model can also be discerned in the operations of Community Relations sections at virtually all mine sites. Specifically there is a focus on the daily management of the local environment, or reactive 'fire-fighting'. This focus on day-to-day administration and management of the local social environment has meant longer term policy development has often been overlooked.<sup>14</sup>

The different political and social context in which they now operate often frustrates these born-again kiaps. A lack of government support and services for the communities in which they operate, is a constant concern. The classic case was a series of reports written by a sequence of ex-kiaps brought in by CRA Minerals to assist with landownership studies at the problematic Mt Kare alluvial mine in Enga Province during 1988-1992. All were frustrated by dealing with disputing groups of landowners with little or no government intervention, and having no power themselves to become involved in controlling the situation. One wrote:

*The Government, remote and preoccupied with its own internal politicking, has shown scant interest in recognising that a problem exists, let alone addressing itself to finding a solution. It must be anticipated that the Government, through its disinterest, will permit the situation to drift out of control. Even then it must be doubted whether any effective measures to assert Government authority will be taken.*<sup>15</sup>

Two points about this novel context are worth highlighting. First, as consultants and Community Affairs staff, ex-kiaps become involved in much more protracted processes of negotiation than they did when they were kiaps. No longer are they arbitrarily able to 'settle' disputes. Part of the reason for this is their lack of legislative resources. Second, they obviously do not have the same recourse to the deployment of state violence that they did before. As a result they feel they are, to employ a phrase used by a Community Affairs manager comparing his current role with that of his time in the colonial administration, 'flying by the seat of our pants'.

## Conclusions

'Australian kiaps sat at the gate of the money haus and everything worked smoothly. . . Just because they were Australians their people were very happy to send money.'<sup>16</sup>

To us, two possible conclusions can be drawn from this return of the kiap. The first is that the continued utility of the kiap model highlights aspects of the technological requirements of administration in rural Papua New Guinea. In particular daily contact, and building relationships with the people they deal with are critical elements in the success of both the kiap model, and their current roles.

Second, the returning Australian kiap still has a legitimacy amongst rural Papua New Guineans that contemporary government officers do not. Clearly this legitimacy is derived from their gatekeeper role - as company Community Relations staff they can access more resources more effectively than a government officer. The continuing link between providing 'development' and legitimacy is critical in explaining the 'failure' of government.

With the benefit of 30 years hindsight we can reflect on Sinclair's question which opened this paper - whether there would be a place for *Pax Australiana* in the 'brave new world' of an Independent Papua New Guinea. The short answer is yes, although in place of the sureties of the *Pax Australiana*, kiaps

reincarnated as community affairs officers for the mineral resource industry have been engaged in a more limited, but increasingly more complicated, *Pax Corporata*.

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## **I am not a stupid native!**

### **Decolonising Images and Imagination in Solomon Islands**

**Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, Political and Social Change, ANU**

Decolonisation is a power relation in which an emerging independent state uses indigenous elites, community leaders and other individuals to exert control over a defined boundary, often created by the withdrawing imperial power. The role of individuals in legitimising the state's control is significant. Michel Foucault, discussing the relationship between power and individuals, asserts that the individual is merely an instrument for the transmission of power: 'They are not the target of power. They help transmit it'.<sup>1</sup> This is an important observation when one considers how and why indigenous peoples in post-colonial societies submit to and are used for the transmission of power - a process that often leaves them powerless, decades after independence. To understand this, it is pertinent to explore the perceptions created about indigenous peoples and how those perceptions have been inherited and localised. In Melanesia, and the Pacific islands in general, such perceptions are embodied in concepts such as 'native', 'bush kanaka', and 'boy'. These concepts were used extensively in the colonial era to define the power relation between the colonial masters and their Melanesian subjects, and to reinforce their differing positions in that relationship.

Consequently, because these power relations have been established and institutionalised through colonially established institutions such as churches, schools and administrative structures, decolonisation often fails to erase the nature of the relationship between Europeans (who represent the former colonial powers) and indigenous peoples. Hence, despite the decolonisation of Melanesia, the relationship between Melanesians and their white counterparts continues to be overshadowed by perceptions created during the colonial era and perpetuated since by Melanesians. In writing about decolonisation in Oceania, and more specifically on Australian policies toward the participation of Papua New Guineans in the political process in colonial Papua New Guinea, J. W. Davidson noted that 'because it is based on emotion - a sense of cultural superiority and an impulse to dominate - it creates a prejudice against local people with a good understanding of Western institutions.'<sup>2</sup> This prejudice is often exacerbated by Melanesians' acceptance of the negative perceptions Europeans have about them. During the relatively short period of colonial control, many Islanders came to accept their status as native colonial subjects, inferior to their European masters. This is despite the fact that many Melanesian societies sought to reestablish their dignity and independence through social-based proto-nationalist movements such as the Ma'asina Rule movement in Solomon Islands, the John Forum Movement in Vanuatu and the Mataungan Association in Papua New Guinea. However, these movements were suppressed and dismissed by the colonial authorities as irrational, millenarian and cargo cultic.<sup>3</sup> Such treatment of indigenous social movements contributed to the negative perception that often outlives constitutional independence and perpetuates an imbalanced power relation.

In Solomon Islands, nearly two decades after political independence, many Solomon Islanders still have inferior perceptions of themselves as compared to Europeans (and increasingly Asians). These perceptions were inherited from the colonial era and perpetrated concepts such as 'native', 'bush kanaka', and 'boy'. Although these terms are slowly disappearing from mainstream vocabulary, the disempowering discourse they served persists. It influences how Islanders relate to outside ideologies, institutions and people.

This paper explores how the concepts of native, boy and bush kanaka in Solomon Islands were created and maintained, and how that contributes to the maintenance of colonial discourses decades after constitutional independence. These concepts have also been inherited, internalised and generally accepted by Solomon Islanders, thus perpetuating the nature of power relation between indigenous people and Europeans. In that



relationship the native Solomon Islander is viewed as inferior compared to the Westerner (and increasingly Asian). The paper argues that decolonisation should involve the deconstruction of the native discourse so as to enable the Solomon Islander to reconstruct his/her image and imagination of his/her future. If that is achieved then decolonisation will be an empowering process that goes beyond constitutional changes. There are four sections: (1) I use my personal experiences to illustrate how Solomon Islanders are confronted by the native identity and how we react to it; (2) a discussion of how the native is created and maintained in both the colonial and post-colonial societies; (3) a demonstration of how in nearly all post-colonial societies, the native is no longer an exclusively European perception. Rather, it has been inherited, internalised, and accepted by Solomon Islanders; (4) this has implications for the process of decolonisation.

### **Discovering and Confronting My Nateness**

It took years of exposure and interaction with many ideas and individuals for me to realise and confront my native identity. I had to go far from home to come to terms with the fact that the native discourse has played an important role in my self-perceptions and relationships with others. I was born in a little village on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, in Solomon Islands, where there were many natives. Like my parents, grandparents, and those before us, I was born a native. Well, at least that was how European masters regarded us. To the colonial administrators, missionaries and Solomon Islander elites in Honiara, we were not just natives - we were bush kanakas. That was because the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal was, until the 1970s, isolated from the major impacts of colonialism. Those who had gone to work in the plantations on the other side of the island, and elsewhere, were referred to, not only as natives and bush kanakas, but as boys, not men. In the late 1980s, while doing university studies, I began to ask questions: how did we acquire the native identity?; what are the perceptions attached to being a native?

As a child in the village in the 1970s, I heard terms such as native, bush kanaka, and boy used by European colonial administrators and missionaries to refer to us. Then, the words simply meant somebody who had 'no savy' about European knowledge and language, and limited access to European goods. Later I realised the salience of these concepts and the profound impact they had on images created about Solomon Islanders, our self-perceptions, and how we imagine our future. It was at the University of the South Pacific that I began to realise how many of these images have been internalised, adopted, inherited and used by us. These concepts became important as discourses for the maintenance of a power relation that favoured the non-native.

During my first year at USP, Vilisoni Hereniko was beginning to carve his path as a Pacific Islander playwright, a path which took him to the Manoa campus of the University of Hawai'i. In that first year at USP, Hereniko produced Leo Hannett's play *The Ungrateful Daughter*. One of the characters in the play was the native Houseboy, Tomtom who works in the home of the Australian couple, Mr and Mrs Carney. In this play, Tomtom is an ignorant native who is impossible to transform into an Australian. Here, Tomtom depicts the stupid native Houseboy who is scold and shouted at by the Carneys. I auditioned for a part in the play and was offered the character Tomtom. That was in 1985. Since then I have been attempting to understand Tomtom, his role as a Houseboy and the complexity that lies behind the innocence he portrays to the Carneys. Why is it that a Melanesian man has been reduced to a Houseboy, doing tasks that in his society are reserved for women? Why has he lost his dignity to the extent of washing Mrs Carney's underwear? In his society, he wouldn't even touch or go under women's clothes.

Another character is Ebonita, the Papua New Guinean adopted daughter of the Carneys. The Australians were trying to transform Ebonita into an Australian because that was perceived as the most noble thing for a native to do. An Australian was regarded as complicated and thus higher in Darwin's strata of evolution. It was assumed that to get out of being native one needed to be transformed - to become like one's master. Ebonita, the native adopted daughter, is going through that transformation. In one scene Ebonita, frustrated by the comments of her adopted family, admits her nativeness by exclaiming: 'But I am a native!'

*The Ungrateful Daughter*, set in early 1970 Papua New Guinea, is an anticolonial play targeted at Australian policies, particularly in relation to large-scale resource development. However, what struck me most was the interaction between the concept of native and the processes of colonialism and decolonisation. Through the play (and especially in the characters Tomtom and Ebonita) I started to confront my own nativeness. Tomtom, the obedient Houseboy, demonstrates the disempowering native discourse at work. His presence in the home of the Carneys is unnoticed except as a Houseboy serving the needs and answering 'yes Sir', 'yes Mrs' to their commands. To the Carneys he is the typical native whose cultures and customs are primitive and therefore irrelevant for the colonisers. When Tomtom refused to wash Mrs Carney's underwear because, as he stated 'hemi tambu long ples blong mi. Man i no ken holem tanget blong ol mere. Bae i kasem sik, bae i no napu kasim kapul . . .' (it's tambu where I come from. A man cannot hold a woman's clothes. He will get sick and won't be able to catch possums), he was dismissed as 'lazy and making excuses'. Here, the colonial masters refuse to acknowledge that the native possesses a complex set of cultures that regulate his everyday life. By dismissing native cultures as superstitious, the colonial process disempowers and simplifies the native to a mere artefact for the articulation of colonial policies. In Foucault's terms, he is just an individual essential in the transmission of colonial power.<sup>4</sup> In the play, Ebonita takes on the confrontational role that leads to decolonisation. It is her adoption that gave her the opportunity to understand the colonial masters and her education equipped her to revolt. Here, Ebonita is the beacon for decolonisation.

It was not only Hannett's *Ungrateful Daughter* that made me confront my native identity. At USP I also met the Samoan novelist, Albert Wendt, who became not only my teacher, but an important mentor in the reconstruction of my self-image. His novels *Sons for the Return Home*, *Flying-fox in a Freedom Tree*, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, *Pouliuli*, *The Birth and Death of a Miracle Man*, and numerous other works became important in influencing how I confront and deal with being a native. I also read Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile*.<sup>5</sup> Numerous Pacific Islander poets also became important. Ruperaki Petaia's *Kidnapped* began my questions about my education. Recently, the poems of my friend and colleague Teresia Teaiwa were important. As she ventures to discover her place in the Pacific Islands as a person of mixed parentage, I venture into rediscovering my integrity - to shift from being a stupid native. Subramani's *Altering Imaginations*<sup>6</sup> helped alter my imagination about myself as a native and how I relate to others.

My exposure to the reconstruction of my self-image was compounded by my introduction to Pacific history. In particular, I was introduced to the Canberra school and its campaigns for the decolonisation of Pacific history. My first history classes at the University of the South Pacific were dominated by the works of J. W. Davidson, Donald Denoon, Hurry Maude and others, most of whom originated from ANU (in particular, what I found to be the confusingly winding corridors of the Coombs building which housed, amongst other things, the Division of Pacific and Asian History). Central in the endeavours of these distinguished scholars was the idea of creating a Pacific history that is 'island centred and Islander oriented' - a history, not only about Pacific Islanders, but also from Islanders' perspectives. The idea was to empower Pacific Islanders through history. Amongst the first set of readings I was given was Maude's *Pacific History - Past, Present and Future*:

*Pacific history is not only a fascinating specialisation in its own right, studying a regional laboratory of historical variables in miniature that will enable it to make an increasing contribution to the discipline as a whole, but that it also has a very practical and therapeutic role to enact in assisting the rehabilitation of the Pacific people at the end of a traumatic era of European political, economic and technological ascendancy by renewing their self-respect and providing them with a secure historical base from which to play their part as responsible citizens of independent or self governing communities in a new world*<sup>7</sup>.

This statement appealed tremendously to a teenage Solomon Islander exposed to the concepts of

decolonisation and empowerment for the first time. I succumbed to the discipline of history and quietly vowed to rediscover my historical roots in an attempt to empower myself. In so doing, I discovered the works of Pacific Islander historians. But I was disappointed. There were only a few - Brij Lal, the late Sione Latukefu, Malama Meleisea, John Waiko among the most prominent. Worse still, most can only be found in Australia and New Zealand, where Pacific history is manufactured and written. The Pacific islands are only the research laboratories and teaching ground. After years of being taught that history will empower me, and of teaching Pacific history to fellow Pacific Islanders, I have come to question why Pacific Islanders, and Solomon Islanders in particular, have not been empowered. Why is it that decades after the Canberra school was born, the Pacific History Association is still dominated by non-Pacific Islanders? As for the goal of creating an 'island oriented history', I soon realised that the doctrine, as Ian Campbell puts it, is 'by now acquiring grey hairs'.<sup>8</sup> Such questions have beckoned me to come to terms with my native, bush kanaka, and boy identity.

The works of these historians were supplemented by the contributions of anthropologists, who sought to explain Pacific societies, and push to the core of anthropological discourses such as ethnological investigations. It was then that I began to be acquainted with the truth behind concepts such as the noble savage and the preconceptions of early Europeans in the Pacific Islands. Through my readings of anthropology I began to discover European construction of the non-European man, and how that has influenced European attitudes towards non-European peoples.<sup>9</sup> Also, as Campbell observed, European perceptions of Islanders have changed over the years: 'the emphasis passed from purity and virtue to observed vices such as treachery, theft, cruelty, poverty and oppression... a sequence from noble savage to sinful savage, and successively, comic savage, degraded savage, and finally, disgusting savage'.<sup>10</sup> This proved pertinent in my understanding of power relations between White people and Solomon Islanders.

I realised the anthropological obsessions with Solomon Islands and the Pacific islands in general. An obsession led a senior delegate from American Samoa at the Second South Pacific Conference to say that 'the Pacific Islander was beginning to feel like a gold-fish in a bowl, forever being watched, measured, weighed and interrogated'. Similarly, a representative from French Polynesia observed that 'in Tahiti they now defined the nuclear family as man, wife, children and social anthropologist'.<sup>11</sup> In Solomon Islands, anthropology was also thriving in its creation of the Solomon Islander whom the anthropologist places in a basket labeled the Melanesian native. Roger Keesing in his attempt to find the 'typical primitive social group', journeyed into the heart of the Kwaio society in the mountains of Malaita. For the *waneagu* of Kwaio, it was more an attempt to comprehend why a white man had left his home and abundant material goods to live with them. They knew nothing about anthropologists, anthropological discourses and the images that have been created of the Kwaio man as the most primitive and hostile of Solomon Islanders - images that later I found as photographs hanging on the walls of the Coombs Building where Keesing carved his career. The Kwaio accepted Keesing into their society and when he died his ashes were taken back to Kwaio. In recounting his first encounter with the Kwaio people, Keesing wrote:

*I knew the Kwaio could be dangerous and hostile to outsiders. But I hoped that their suspicion would be tempered because I was an American who had come to study their customs: both 'custom' and Americans were symbols of Malaita resistance to colonialism. I was to learn only years later that I had come as the fulfilment of prophecy and in response to their sacrifices and prayers.*<sup>12</sup>

When Keesing decided to study Malaitans, he was inspired (like other adventurous anthropologists) by the 'early tale of dark savagery, cannibalism, and treacherous violence' in the Melanesian islands 'and none more than Malaita'. These as he later learned, were the constructions of missionaries and planters. He wrote: 'I found when I arrived that these Kwaio featured as the most dangerous villains and darkest and

wildest heathens in the colonialist conversations of planters and missionaries'. Colonialists have chosen to disregard the fact that there is a complex set of customs that distinguish the Kwaio as more than just native villains and heathens. Keesing came to understand and respect that complexity and as he later wrote: 'Suffice it to say that in five trips in the course of fifteen years, my life has become intertwined with theirs in deeply rewarding bonds'. What Keesing did not note is that over the years the Kwaio themselves and other Solomon Islanders have come to accept the Kwaio as the most feared villains and darkest heathens, despite the fact that Kwaio culture resembles other Solomon Islands societies. The only difference is that not all Solomon Islands societies murdered a prominent colonial administrator as the Kwaio did in 1927.<sup>13</sup> Other anthropologists - notably Marshall Sahlins and Ann Chowning - sought to interpret Melanesian cultures and customs. Their interpretations of the Melanesian contributed towards the creation of my Melanesian-ness and nativeness. But how and why did that creation take place?

### Creating the Native

In Solomon Islands, as elsewhere, the concept of native has become accepted as part of the indigenous person's identity. In accepting the native, what is often forgotten is that the native is not original. It is a concept and form of identity created as a consequence of colonialism and the interaction with the West, and consolidated by institutions such as schools and churches that are associated with colonialism. The native is similar to what Edward Said calls the *orient*, which he states is a Western creation. It is a consequence of Western attempts to distinguish itself as different from and better off than the rest of human society.<sup>14</sup> These forces and the desire to be distinct has given rise to the notion of native.

The native, like the *orient*, is a European invention. Said explained that to the European who created orientalism, the *orient* is 'a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experience'. It is the image of the other that helps to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. The *orient* is not merely imaginative, but part of European 'material' civilisation and culture. Said explores orientalism as a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the orient' and (most of the time) 'the occident'. It is basically the distinction between the East and the West as the parting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the orient, its people, customs, 'mind', destiny, etc.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the native in Solomon Islands is an European creation which manifests the superiority of the colonial power. The native is not merely a distinction between East and West, but also between master and subject, superior and inferior. The native identity, therefore, is not easily erased by constitutional and structural changes such as independence. Rather it continues to exist as part of the post-colonial culture, embedded in the psychology of the Solomon Islander.

The experiences are similar to those of African societies. Dickson Mungazi, in *The Mind of Black Africa*, discusses how the West was fascinated and preoccupied with the black skin: 'European preoccupation with skin pigmentation was the primary basis used for interaction and social relationships between people. Nothing else seemed to matter. To Europeans of that time skin color was an important criterion used to determine a person's place in society'.<sup>16</sup> In Solomon Islands, as elsewhere, the native is created to transmit and manifest Western power. In this relationship the native is perceived as inferior and hence, needs to be taken to the higher level of civilisation defined by Western European ideologies. That justifies colonialism, a vehicle for civilising, educating and Christianising the native in order to transform him. Western scholars, therefore, treat the native as a subject for capturing the imagination of the Western public. Here the native is depicted and treated very carefully to ensure it is distinct from the West - the native is a savage who is simultaneously romantic and fascinating. The work of Christian missionaries has also become significant in painting that picture of the native. A Roman Catholic priest after being appointed as parish priest on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, for example, made the following remarks in a letter of 28 October, 1911, to a colleague in Australia:

*The white men haven't ventured here yet to run their stores and while this has its advantages it also means that we have to go without quite a few things. Spiritually Avuavu is not marvelous. These people's morals are incredibly corrupt. There might be more savage tribes elsewhere in the Solomons but in the above field there is no worse. As recently as this week I came across a few instances. Poor people: God's grace will have to be very powerful to convert them and after that to make them persevere. Say a little prayer for them . . . 'may the good Lord take this into account and hasten the hour of grace for this splendid people around us'.<sup>17</sup>*

Such statements depict the native not just as Rousseau's noble savage. The native has, as Campbell puts it, 'becomes less noble'.<sup>18</sup> What did not change is the status of the native in relation with the European. Keesing writes that to the Europeans Solomon Islanders were 'brutish savages the missionary could turn into docile children; strong animals the blackbinder could turn into beasts of burden on the sugar and coconut plantations and lawless cannibals the District Officer could turn into tame subjects'.<sup>19</sup> Such perceptions influenced Islanders' self-perceptions and their relationship with Europeans. The superiority - inferiority nature of the relationship is now perpetuated by local elites and the institutions they inherited.

After years of being called a native, the Solomon Islander internalises the identity and begins to act like one in relations with Europeans. Some attempt to rid the native identity, by imitating the European. This creates a conflict of identity. The creative work of Solomon Islanders reflects an attempt to solve the native's identity crisis and re-establish its dignity. Sam Alasia, in his collection of poems titled *Hostage*, explores how the native is trapped in an identity crisis.<sup>20</sup> *This Man*, a play by the late Francis Bugotu,<sup>21</sup> explores how the native attempts to find an identity and dignity by giving the native a sense of being, and belonging. In the play the native looks at himself and asks: 'This Man! who is he? Who am I?' July Makini's (formerly July Sipolo) works have also reflects the dilemma of the native women. Her collection of poems *Mi Mere*,<sup>22</sup> explores the native woman and the conflicts she encounters. Celestine Kulaghoe, Solomon Island's best known poet, attempts to come to terms with the confusions of identity that the native reflects.

one day i long to have been  
my grandfather.  
another day i long to be  
my own grandson.  
today i wish i didn't have  
two hands.<sup>23</sup>

This is the most difficult of tasks. The decolonisation of Solomon Islanders' images and imagination must involve a realisation that he/she is not just a stupid native.

### **The Native and Decolonisation in Solomon Islands**

Nearly two decades after independence, the native discourse still holds a significant place in Solomon Islanders perceptions. These perceptions continue to determine images and relations between the native and former colonial powers. Francis Bugotu, writing about decolonisation, stated that 'it is a big disadvantage in this world to be black. The trouble with us Solomon Islanders is that we are too black. . . . we are treated as boys rather than men. We were children not knowing what was good for us - loveable little barefooted dears with fuzzy-wuzzy hair'.<sup>24</sup> Such perceptions were compounded by what Keesing described as 'the blatantly presumptuous British assurance of cultural superiority and paternalism in dealing with the "child-like savages", have withered Melanesian pride and identity'.<sup>25</sup> For the native in Solomon Islands, decolonisation cannot be meaningful unless it deconstructs the native discourse - it must rid the indigenous person of the negative images of the colonial era. This is the only way to offset the persistent and unbalanced relations between Solomon Islanders and Europeans. This is not just changing government structures. It is as much a spiritual process as it is a process of cultural transformation.

For me, what is left is to shed the negative images often attached to my nativeness. Decolonisation has just began as I interact more with my 'white' friends, colleagues and counterparts. Through them and their reassurances, I began my path towards self confidence and the realisation that I am not a stupid native. Decolonisation should be a process of rediscovering one's dignity as it is of making constitutional changes. Independence, therefore, is only the beginning of that process, not the end.

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## **Decolonising the Mind: towards an alternative vision for Education in the Solomon Islands**

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This paper is about re-thinking education in the Solomon Islands as an important process of decolonisation, achieving greater sovereignty and development towards a more desirable direction for its people.

More specifically, it is my vision of the need to redirect and provide more relevant and meaningful education for the majority of Solomon Island people. A process this paper argues would require some degree of decolonisation of the mind. This presentation is more a sharing of an idea, rather than a fully researched report.

Here I define education as an introduction to worthwhile learning. In distinguishing between formal and informal education, Konai Thaman defined formal education as 'organised, institutional learning (such as that which occurs in schools and universities), and informal education is what goes on in a community without any formal organisation or assessment'.<sup>1</sup> Relevant education in my opinion is one which offers opportunity for people to learn to live meaningful and rewarding lives. This could occur both in school and the community. Decolonisation, for this paper is seen as a state of freedom for deciding on a country's own destination.

There are also basic assumptions which underlie this discussion:

1. Formal education is more important and valuable than informal education.
2. Academic subjects such as Maths and English are accorded higher status than practical (vocational) subjects like Industrial Arts and Agriculture.
3. The lifestyle led by formal education graduates is better than those who are educated and live in the villages.

Education in the Solomon Islands (as in most Pacific Island societies before European contact) was informal and rarely institutionalised. Education was a preparation for life in a person's own socio-political and physical environment. Education was synonymous with the idea of socialisation in western society. Education was an integral aspect of life where every member of a community was an educator and young people learnt through observation and communal participation. Education was relevant.

In 1893, when Solomon Islands became a British Protectorate informal (traditional) education, though still practised has become overshadowed by an institutionalised western education. The reason for this introduction was that 'the coloniser realised from the outset that the colony would eventually become a sovereign entity and the manner in which to realise this was through formal education'.<sup>2</sup> However, this could also be viewed as the colonial means of reproducing capitalist social relations, and creating a consumer society for colonial introduced products. Formal education therefore assisted to entrench the Solomon Islands into the capitalist global network as a Protectorate. This was realised through the colonial monopoly over contact, control and access to formal education during the colonial period. Through this, colonialism transformed the values that form the basis of important educational practices. Goldsmith made the following conclusion about the fate of traditional societies under colonialism. 'The colonial powers sought to destroy the cultural pattern of traditional societies largely because of their essential features prevented traditional people from subordinating social, ecological and spiritual imperatives to the short term economic ends served by participation in the colonial economy. There is no better way of destroying a society than undermining its educational system.'<sup>3</sup> Formal education is very much isolated from the Islanders, as it reflects elements of colonial culture.

Even fourteen years after independence, formal education is still not relevant for the majority of Solomon Islanders, rather it contributes to their alienation from their communities and the continuing colonisation of their minds. The continuing use of a foreign language of the colonial power as the only official language of formal education and the medium of instruction contributes to the colonisation role of formal education.

'The isolation of the school and its curriculum from the culture, values and activities of the community has further contributed to alienation of young people. Many fundamental elements of the people's way of life are ignored. For example, the sequence of the curriculum content is decided in total disregard to the cycle of activities of the community. Many children are therefore growing up without an appreciation and knowledge of the customs and values of their people. Educational planning has generally been based on the manpower needs of the wage and salary economy, rather than on the needs of integral human development. The curriculum emphasises academic subjects and cognitive skills rather than practical and social skills needed for community development'.<sup>4</sup>

The education system has failed to help the majority of graduates to participate positively in the community. Many return to their communities to find that the education they have received has not prepared them to utilise the resource development opportunities available. They feel failures, no longer value village life, traditions and obligations. They also lack the social and spiritual attitudes and values desirable for life in the community.

These have combined to create a generation of frustrated school leavers, disillusioned parents who feel they have wasted their money and teachers and schools which are seen to have failed the community. The situation is indeed a vicious cycle, because the country continues to expand the formal education sector to increase access, but this in turn increases the number of frustrated people with false hopes and low self esteem and confidence. Instead it increases the market for foreign product output, because the people are educated to become consumers of foreign goods and services.

Formal education, instead of providing our society with a new spirit and hope for advancement, has by and large provided a means of assuring its demise.

### **Decolonising the Mind: a renewed vision for education**

Is there a vision for the future? The situation I have described cannot be allowed to continue. The national government need to adopt a philosophy of education which contains a decolonised vision of an education system which would be relevant to the social, spiritual and resource development needs and opportunities of the majority of Solomon Island people. This vision is one which is based on and aims to achieve the decolonisation of the mind, so that education does not merely take an approach which continues to reflect continuing colonisation of people's thinking, behaviour and attitudes.

It is a decolonised vision for education, that accepts the local culture and builds upon it to develop Solomon Islanders who:

- are committed to their own personal development and see education as a continuing life long process;
- develop a productive work ethic, and value both rural and urban community development in the context of national development;
- are prepared for life in the community, accepting the limitations of our small island country and living with their means;
- are capable of participating in further training for manpower needs.

This decolonised vision for education holds the view that the above goals will be best achieved by providing a basic education which:



- strengthens people's identification with, rather than alienation from their communities;
- gives a degree of competence in subjects such as English, Maths and Science, as it is vital that citizens in a developing country acquire functional literacy.

Such a system takes the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the people as its starting point, targets the development needs and opportunities of the community and provides additional knowledge and skills necessary for contemporary living.

What I have tried to communicate is an alternative approach to education, as a means to achieving a greater degree of decolonisation in Solomon Islands. The vital role of formal education in the colonisation of the people was highlighted, as it had been used to transform traditional societies to adopt new lifestyles, and develop a consumer dependent mentality. Further it has moulded a huge number of frustrated people with marginal identities. This paper takes the view that a balanced philosophy for education is vital for decolonisation and the renewed philosophy for education can be possible only if there is a decolonisation of the mind. If formal education in its colonial form is an instrument of colonisation then an alternative approach to education is essential as an instrument of decolonisation. This paper is suggesting a renewed vision for education to develop a truly decolonised society.

1. Konai Thaman, 'Reclaiming a place: culture and higher education in Oceania', paper presented at SICHE's 10th anniversary, 1994. See also R. Sharp, *Knowledge, ideology and politics of schooling*, London, 1990.
2. L. Kii, 'Taking us to the present from pre-colonial to post-independence issues and problems pertinent in our education system', *Ibid*.
3. E. Goldsmith, *The way: an ecological world view*, Boston, 1993, 285.
4. *Philosophy of Education for Papua New Guinea*, 1986, 6.

## Decolonising the Intellectual Mind-Set: the Case of Papua New Guinea

Rona N. Nadile, Public Policy Program, ANU

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this workshop. I feel honoured to have been invited. First I acknowledge Greg Fry of the Department of International Relations, for his *Framing the Islands: Knowledge and Power in Changing Australian Images of 'the South Pacific'*.<sup>1</sup> In the face of adverse reporting and longstanding perceptions on the Pacific Islands and especially Papua New Guinea, he has taken a bold step, not just for Islanders, but recognising the good qualities in people. I am inspired by what he wrote and encouraged that others are thinking along similar lines. **Thank you Greg!**

When I started thinking about this topic, I did not know about Greg's Paper. As I survey the literature, the issues surrounding decolonisation are broad, relating to religion, culture, politics, orientalism, and of course framing the Pacific Islands, the Pacific paradise.<sup>2</sup> Coming from outside Political Science, I find the literature overwhelming. I focus on Papua New Guinea.

This paper is exploratory, based on literature survey and personal observation. My target audience are Papua New Guineans, and aid donors and consultants who make or influence policy-making and implementation. I also have in mind researchers, academics, investors and others with an interest in PNG. The intent of this paper is to promote positive thinking and attitudes, that Papua New Guineans can rise above intellectual inferiority, corruption and crime and remake Papua New Guinea. This can be achieved when appropriate and workable government policies are implemented. Simultaneously, people - citizens and non-citizens in the public and private sectors - play a leading role in influencing the policy process from an intellectual perspective.

Decolonising comes from 'colony', which means several things but one that relates to this workshop is 'any territory politically controlled by a distant state'. Decolonising is the dismantling of political control from a distant state and allowing local control. 'Intellectual' involves ability to think analytically, 'and understand ideas and information'. This paper refers to the dismantling of certain fixed perceptions and patronising attitudes about Papua New Guineans' mental capacity. Unless the negative, degrading thinking and attitudes are dismantled, colonialism of the mind will remain - hence the continuation of intellectual dependency. I base my discussion on two basic questions: Why is decolonisation such a difficult task? and Can we really decolonise? and for what purpose? First I want to read a story.

### Quack, Quack - I'm a Chicken!<sup>3</sup>

Once upon a time (yes, this is a sort of fairy tale, or a parable), there was a farmer who, among other things, raised chickens. One day as he was out on his tractor he passed by a small pond. Next to the water he found the scattered remains of a female duck - apparently killed by a fox.

The farmer also came upon a nest of duck eggs that the fox had somehow missed. He carefully scooped up the eggs, carried them back to the barn, and placed them in the nest of the barnyard hen. The trick worked. The old mother chook got the idea that the eggs were hers. As maternal instinct kicked in, she sat on the eggs, just as she always did, until they finally hatched.

The ducklings never knew the difference. They assumed that the old hen was their mother and followed her around the barnyard just the way baby chicks would usually do. The rest of the chickens didn't know the difference either. They readily accepted the ducklings as members of the family.

Until one day, when a summer rainstorm had left a huge puddle of water in the barnyard. The chickens carefully picked their way around the edges of the water. But without even thinking, the ducklings just waddled over.

The mother hen was greatly alarmed. 'Get out of there this instant!' she frantically cried. 'You can't do that. You're chickens. You'll drown!' Reluctantly the ducklings left the puddle. The water had felt so good in the hot sun.

The incident was only the beginning of the ducklings' confusion. They did their best to blend into the chicken culture, but they continued to suffer embarrassing lapses. Sometimes when they tried to cluck, they quacked instead.

Sometimes when they got excited, they would flap their wings and start to fly - until they remembered that they were chickens and chickens didn't do that. Their embarrassment slowly grew into frustration and finally deepened into depression. Something wasn't right, and they couldn't figure out what it was.

One night a wise old owl sitting in a nearby tree saw the ducklings and said, 'Whoooooooooooo...are you?' 'Chickens', they replied sheepishly. (Sorry, I couldn't resist that.) They were ashamed to admit it. They knew they were not very good representatives of the chicken community. 'Don't be ridiculous', the owl replied. 'You're not chickens. You're ducks!'

'What do you mean?' they replied. 'I mean just what I said', the owl smiled.

'You're not chickens. You're not made to cluck and scratch the ground. Haven't you ever felt like swimming across a pond? Haven't you ever felt like spreading your wings and flying away?'

'Yes!' they replied. 'Yes, we've felt that way many times. But we were always told that we couldn't. We were always told that we weren't supposed to.'

'Horsefeathers!' cried the owl. 'You're ducks! You were *made* to swim! You were made to fly!' The ducklings stared up at the owl in disbelief, then looked around excitedly. 'Well', the owl finally said, 'what are you waiting for?'

This story illustrates what many Papua New Guineans experience with the mixed messages we receive about us as a people - thinking (analytical thinking!) and understanding, intelligent people. For example, Thomas concludes his discussion of problems of educational provision in PNG by hoping that 'Papua New Guinean educators who are presently grappling with this problem, and who are themselves products of an Australian-model school system, will be able to devise a system of education for an independent Papua New Guinea whose social benefits will far outweigh the social costs.'<sup>4</sup> After twenty-one years of independence we should be able to but we have not, and we continue to receive prescriptions on how to govern and ways to develop. The basic colonial political, bureaucratic and socio-economic systems and structures continue to be regenerated. We have grown accustomed to our colonial heritage.

### **Why Decolonisation is Difficult**

In spite of the policies and strategies of colonialism, the change that was brought about in the process at the time in the history of PNG, in one way was good. Contrary to popular belief and experience elsewhere, I think colonialism was a blessing in disguise - colonialism was freedom in the scattered and isolated societies. Being colonised was so good that when we try to decolonise, we cannot quite do it. Instead, we poeticize decolonisation in poetry such as 'Emerging Countries' and 'Transition';<sup>5</sup> we romanticise it with songs such as 'Port Moresby' by Mari Ellingson.<sup>6</sup> Was there a city in traditional times? No: so when did Port Moresby become the 'City of Our Dreams'? Port Moresby was a colonial city and we are sad that it is no longer the city of our dreams, no longer the light of our land and the pride of our hearts. And we politicise decolonisation. The founders of PNG's nationhood proclaimed that we lowered the Australian flag as we raised the PNG flag in 1975. We did not tear down or burn the Australian flag.<sup>7</sup> That first day of independence was greeted with joy by politicians and their followers, sadness by those who had nurtured a relationship, and confusion by the rural majority who did not understand what independence was all about.

It seems that these expressions in poetry, song and political statements reflect the impact of colonisation on the lives of the people. Colonialism touched lives in a significant moment, and for PNG I think it was mostly a good and cherished experience. Perhaps this is why PNG has an unusually close relationship with Australia. Saffu described this relationship well:

*There is not likely to be another country, even in the South Pacific, whose prime minister sent a congratulatory message to the New South Wales government on Sydney winning the competition to stage the Olympic Games in 2000; whose prime minister and opposition leader both routinely congratulate the winner in Australian general elections and commiserate with the loser; where all normal official work comes to a stand-still on Melbourne Cup day; where fanatical partisanship during the state of origin rugby clashes in Australia seems to polarise the population; where telecasts from at least four Australian TV stations are available to the elite (admittedly alongside telecasts from Malaysia, the Philippines and the US); and where Australia is the only country to which off-peak reduced telephone charges apply.<sup>8</sup>*

The essential ingredients of this relationship are historical. For example, the cherished experiences already mentioned, but also Australia's involvement with the two World Wars and the Cold War led to security relations, then there is business and trade, education and training, political and diplomatic relations, and to a lesser degree, immigration, scientific and cultural relations. These are some of the important bases of the relationship.

In traditional Papua New Guinea societies, we were a people, strong and courageous, defending our shores and fighting our own battles. We were intelligent and full of wisdom in the dealings of our traditional societal norms and expectations. We had socio-economic systems that were reliable and workable. We had laws and penalties that worked, and we housed, fed and clothed ourselves. In essence, we were highly self reliant and independent. We did not depend on anyone beyond our lands and shores for assistance.

The emergence of colonialism that led to civilisation and modernisation, shifted us from being somebody, to being nobody. This is a significant turning point. I think we lost ourselves as the people that we were. We became like adopted children, dependent on the adopted parent to provide for us - thinking analytically for us and giving us lots of money to spend on whatever we choose. So there remains a belief that we were nothing, we were nobody, and the Whiteman came and made us (or tried to make us) into somebody. There was freedom from fear, sickness and disease and other advantages such as improved roads, transport, communications and so on. Although these improvements also come with new fears, disease and hosts of other problems, this is why colonialism is perceived as good because it was a liberating experience in various forms.

Going back to the Whiteman making us into somebody, I think Papa Australia ('Papa' more appropriate than 'Mama' as most decisions are made by men in government!) tried to make us into somebody that we are not. Now Australia's patience and the heart of giving has become weary while PNG has become quite like a spoilt teenager, rebellious and wasteful. Like the ducks in the story, we have been turned into somebody else, but deep within us we know we are intelligent and confident people. Our orientation to regain this position comes with mixed messages so we are still waiting to make a leap and hopefully fly without further delay. There is a missing link that I believe must be restored to make us the people that we were - strong and courageous, intelligent and confident to run the affairs of our country independently. What is likely to prolong the waiting is where Australian politicians, business, bureaucrats and other donor agencies still 'influence aspects of policy-making and implementation ... through their control over ... aid funds'<sup>9</sup> At the same time Government (politicians) do not 'grow up and out' of the corruptive practices of governance, and PNG intellectuals do not take a stand on aspects of the policy process.

Can We Really Decolonise?

And for what purpose should we decolonise? When the colonial legacy lives on for decades and the systems and structures have become assimilated into the local cultures, institutions and agencies, it seems impossible to truly decolonise. However much we may try, there are some things that I believe will remain part of our systems and structures. I do think though that certain areas can be decolonised. One is the mind, the thinking of people, so that confidence in the intellectual capacity of the people can be rebuilt and restored.

How can the mind be decolonised? Briefly, by building human resource capacity through education and training in both informal and formal settings in the private and public sectors. The day before independence, *The Age* reported 3,100 graduates. Data since independence are not available. Tables 1 and 2 present only Papua New Guineans studying in Australia under government sponsorship. According to AusAid, the fields of study in Table 1 indicate the needs of the country, while Table 2 shows the relative strength of undergraduate programs in PNG. 53% of students are doing post-graduate studies in Australia. The distribution of awards may be questioned. Do we really need more economics, business and administration (36%) personnel than agriculture (4%) and education (6%)? Whether or not the awards were based on human resource assessment in PNG is not known. And there remains a gender imbalance where 29% are female students, and 71% male.<sup>10</sup>

There are two national Professors (both male), about four female Ph D graduates, a dozen males with Ph D degrees and probably hundreds more with Masters and Undergraduate degrees. What happened to the graduates, the intellectuals? Papua New Guineans have made headlines in the political and bureaucratic arena, the diplomatic service and the judiciary and the court systems. But when it comes to intellectual matters, we are inferior. We have published less and there are no known intellectuals as a corporate body for government to call upon to think analytically over issues such as corruption, law and order, health and education, land tenure and Bougainville. Papua New Guinea needs Papua New Guinean intellectuals more now than ever, to influence government policy making and implementation.

Table 1: AusAid Sponsored PNG Students, 31 March 1996

Number of Students	Field of Study
15 (3%)	<i>Other courses</i>
20 (4%)	<i>Agriculture and Related Study</i>
16 (3%)	<i>Architecture, Building and Survey</i>
39 (8%)	<i>Arts, Humanities and Social Science</i>
182 (36%)	<i>Economics, Business and Administration</i>
32 (6%)	<i>Education</i>
55 (11%)	<i>Engineering</i>
48 (10%)	<i>Health and Community Services</i>
28 (6%)	<i>Law and Legal Studies</i>
68 (13%)	<i>Natural sciences</i>
<b>Total: 503</b>	

**Table 2: Programs**

<b>Number of Awards</b>	<b>Type of Award</b>
46 (9%)	<i>Ph Ds (Doctoral Studies)</i>
159 (31%)	<i>Postgraduate Masters</i>
55 (11%)	<i>Postgraduate Diploma and Certificates</i>
132 (26%)	<i>Undergraduate</i>
33 (6%)	<i>Other Undergraduate</i>
8 (2%)	<i>Other Postgraduate</i>
49 (10%)	<i>TAFE and Technical Colleges</i>
25 (5%)	<i>Other (e.g.. Trainees)</i>
<b>Total: 507</b>	

I have tried to show that colonialism was not altogether a bad experience. It brought freedom in various forms, and much has been cherished. There is no doubt that decolonisation is difficult, as colonial systems and structures (and the English language) become part of PNG society. Political and other forms of decolonisation have been tried. We need an alternative to truly decolonise the intellectual legacy. That alternative I believe is intellectual capacity - to rebuild and transform in order to remake us as the people that we were, and even better. We will make mistakes, and we may fail; but we need to give ourselves a chance, and I plead with those who have an interest in our affairs, to be positive and encouraging - to bring out the best in the people.

1. Greg Fry, *Framing the islands: knowledge and power in changing Australian images of 'The South Pacific'*, Department of International Relations Working Paper 5, 1996.
2. B.S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, London, 1994; E. Said, 'From orientalism', in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, New York, 1993.
3. 'Quack, Quack - I'm a Chicken!' is from *Loving the God Who Loves You*, Eastbourne, 1993.
4. E.B. Thomas, 'Problems of educational provision in Papua New Guinea: an area of scattered population', in E.B. Thomas, *Papua New Guinea Education*, London, 1976.
5. A. Jerewai, 'Emerging countries', *Papua New Guinea Writing*, 9 (1973), 14; O. Lebasi, 'Transition', *Ibid.*, 10 (1973), 9.
6. M. Ellingson, 'Port Moresby', *The very best of Salima, Vol. 2*, Chin H. Min, Port Moresby, 1994. 'Port Moresby the place of our dreams, we long for the good times, the freedom we knew, Port Moresby, Port Moresby, the light of our land...'
7. E.g. Sir F. Reiher, 20th Independence Anniversary Speech, Canberra, 1995.
8. Yaw Saffu, 'Papua New Guinea', in Trood, et al. (eds.), *The Asia-Australia Survey 1994*, MacMillan, Australia.
9. *Ibid.*, 225.
10. 'Snapshot of Training', Australian Agency for International Development, 1995.

## Whose voices are heard? Oral history and the decolonisation of history.

**Roderic Lacey, Australian Catholic University, Ballarat**

### Prologue: *Pale, haye kekeep score*

Vincente Diaz, in his perceptive review of tales of demise and survival in Guam, tells how Mavis Warner Van Peenen, wife of an American naval officer, recorded how a young Chamorro girl asked two Spanish priests playing tennis Agana in 1941: *Pale, haye kekeep score?* Van Peenen notes some of the historical nuances of such a phrase from the mouth of a Chamorro:

*Father, who is keeping the score? ...Pale the Chamorro adaptation of the Spanish word Padre; haye, a pure Chamorro interrogative pronoun meaning who?; Kekeep, an English word but the first syllable reduplicated in the Chamorro manner to show tense, and finally the word score a pure English word.*

Against Van Peenen's pessimism concerning the demise of the purity of Chamorro language, Diaz argues that the quotation signifies durability and tenacity. Here is evidence as much of Chamorro influence on how Spanish and English are used on Guam, as on the impact of these languages on a passive people.<sup>1</sup>

*... It reveals a political history of the subject(ificat)ion of English and Spanish terms by Chamorro linguistic rules ... It begins by addressing the priest properly, that is, in his vernacular as well as with the appropriate title, padre, but through the flicking of a Chamorro tongue (pale). It pauses and then continues in Chamorro with its own interrogative pronoun haye who and then taps into the English term keep, subjected, however, to a persistent Chamorro rule of reduplication for what is grammatically called the present tense (kekeep). The utterance ends with the unadulterated (vs pure) English word score...*

*The utterance of 1941 is more than an instance of a prewar Chamorro discursive maneuver, an operation on the remnants of Spanish and American language and colonialism, on Gam. It also provides a contemporary political commentary: whose frame of reference will prevail - who gets to keep score in the contest that features Spanish padres playing an American sport in the land of the Chamorros? ... In the form recollected by Van Peenen in 1941, the Chamorro language is still keeping score ..*

Who, indeed, is keeping score, or whose voice is heard? The wife of an American colonial official or a contemporary Chamorro-speaking scholar of Filipino-Pohnpeian ancestry, American educated, now teaching in the University of Guam? Diaz is certain of where he stands and whose voice he is hearing.

*By way of kekeeping score - for this is a good way to narrate Guam's history as any other chronological accounting of discrete events along a Eurocentric calendar - let me suggest, then, not the collection of a quaint lore of a primitive folk in doom, but the re-collection of island memories that wait restlessly in the ritual of everyday language of everyday island historical realities.*

From this case do I propose that not only are Chamorro voices, traditions, language and categories surviving, but that they are alive and vibrant, and that if we are attentive to their nuances they subvert and operate on the remnants of Spanish and American colonialism? Does this case show that Chamorro voices are best heard and mediated by Chamorro historians, educated in America, who can decolonise imperial history by attentive reinterpretation of colonial sources in ways that free authentic native voices? As a start, these may be the most appropriate arguments derived from this Chamorro case.

Edward Said gives us constant reminders of the web, structures, politics and language of imperialism,

and points up ways in which the colonised assert their own identity and their own history:<sup>2</sup>

*... this study proposes itself as a step towards an understanding not so much of Western politics and of the non-Western world in those politics as of the **strength** of Western cultural discourse, a strength too often mistaken as merely decorative or superstructural. My hope is to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination, and specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others.*<sup>3</sup>

That attentiveness to the strength of the native Chamorro voice which Diaz urges, takes on fresh meaning in the context of this warning. In what forms do indigenous and non-indigenous Pacific Island historians mediate to us the native voices in oral sources? We need to be armed as readers with the hermeneutics of suspicion (to borrow from feminist scholars of Scripture).<sup>4</sup> And, in these terms, perhaps we need to ask not only whose voices are heard; but in what shape, form, tongue; and have we ways of entangling these messy imperial entanglements?

Said suggests the pathway of the inventory. The foundation for this pathway he has taken from Antonio Gramsci who wrote in his *Prison Notebooks*:

*The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is knowing thyself as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory ... [T]herefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.*<sup>5</sup>

Said builds on this foundation:

*Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an Oriental as a child growing up in two British colonies. All of my education, in [Palestine and Egypt] and in the United States, has been Western, and yet that deep early awareness has persisted. In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals ... Whether what I have achieved is the inventory prescribed by Gramsci is not for me to judge, although I have felt it important to be conscious of trying to produce one ....*<sup>6</sup>

Said's proposal is an important starting-point to free Pacific historians of colonial domination in both language and understanding. This inventory is one voice that should be heard in decolonising history.

In the introduction to *Redemption Songs: A Life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki*, Judith Binney points to the long debate in New Zealand about the writing of Maori history. She notes that the main trend has been to ensure that Maori understandings and values be given full weight. The debate is about narrating history in ways meaningful to Maori. Assessing what weight might be given to Pakeha written accounts and Maori oral and written sources, Binney argues that

*The debate must be about the ability to understand the issues involved, and the strength of the ideas developed in the writing ... The act of writing history can be conceived as an encounter between the multifaceted human past and the individual who is constructing the present narrative. This construction of history as literature, however, is very different from self-representation by the participants. The act of historical reconstruction allows different voices to speak; it reveals people in their own times and contexts, which are not our own and should not be seen to be like our own ... But no one owns the past; no one owns that complexity of shared experiences and human and cultural exchange. The past is inhabited by all own ancestors. In 19th-century Aotearoa our ancestors are entwined ....*<sup>7</sup>

This vision of the entanglements of Maori and Pakeha ancestors and their sources imbues this sensitive biography, in which she represents a Maori leader in ways that will illuminate him for Maori, as well as for Pakeha, by respecting Maori ways of seeing.<sup>8</sup> Despite these entanglements, she reminds us that conflict between historical sources cannot be reconciled, nor should their differences be smoothed



away; this variety of sources cannot simply be interwoven. Rather, she seeks to juxtapose different ways of recording and narrating history, to maintain historical integrity and to attend to competing understandings.<sup>9</sup>

We now seem caught in this net of interpretation and its different contexts and demands. These writers urge us to attend to different voices if we are to free historical sources, understanding and writing from the invasions of colonisation and domination. Diaz alerts us to the ways in which native voices, traditions, language and categories undermine the dominant powers of colonisers. Said reminds us that by making an inventory of these shaping forces, it is possible to both use and to subvert the strength of the language and forms of domination, and for colonised people to assert their own identity and their own history. Binney seeks a just balance between competing histories, world views and sources by recognising differences and juxtaposing, not blending, those differences to ensure that different voices are allowed to be heard and that Maori understandings and values be given full weight. She draws on a variety of sources, of voices: official printed archives, personal and public manuscripts, newspapers, Maori and Pakeha oral traditions and testimonies, as well as photographs and other visual records.

There is a common thread through these positions: the decolonising of history requires attentive and subtle strategies, draws on a wide range of sources and recognises, through a hermeneutics of suspicion, the contexts, filters and positions from which voices are represented. Oral sources, while allowing indigenous voices to be heard, have real value when located in their determining contexts and when not heard in isolation, and are recognised with other sources, not reconciled or smoothed away.

### Some cases from Papua New Guinea

Two cases are considered: one from the Tolai of New Britain and the other from the Enga of the Highlands. First we need to smooth the ground. Pangia, an elder from the Mulapini tribe at Mulitaka in the Lagaip district in the west of Enga Province, was deeply suspicious of me when I questioned him about his ancestral history in July 1972. In the following month, his adopted son, Philip Pato, who worked with me as a research assistant, sat in the men's house with Pangia, who allowed him to taperecord their conversation.

*I can tell you how our community began and the names of fathers and sons from our founder down to me and my sons. But I know that this knowledge is incomplete. When my grandfather and father taught me in our mens house they did not tell me that a curious European would come and put me to the test by asking many questions about the times before ...*<sup>10</sup>

Pangia and I were related to his past, his people's history, in two different ways: for him this thread of genealogical history which bound him to his place and gave him his name and identity were central to his being a Mulapini man. For me as outsider, speaking another language, my questions were part of my strategy of inquiry into Enga men's knowledge about strands of their oral traditions. But, in the face of my curiosity as a European, Pangia was seeing what had been whole for him and his ancestors as now incomplete. That disturbed him. Nevertheless Pangia taught Philip Pato the elements of that genealogical history. His teaching was embodied in *kongali pii* (picture language), symbolic, poetic language.

Binney, working with Te Kooti's teaching by parable and the vast body of songs (*awaita*) attributed to him by his followers in the Ringatu faith, argues:

*Far from paralysing initiative ... prophetic traditions ... offer alternative understandings, as the language of allegory and symbol is the language of multivalence of meaning. We who claim to live in an age of signs tend to construct much more narrowly defined messages and forget the infinite variety of shadow and light which is maintained through a language of symbols ... Thus many layers of experience were, and still are, transmitted in Maori culture.*<sup>11</sup>

So, if we are to decolonise history by listening to indigenous voices, those voices, if embodied in oral traditions, tales of survival, songs, chants, performances, may well be in a symbolic voice with multiple

meanings. For curious Europeans, posing their questions which elicit these voices, the task of translation and mediation may be heavy and challenging.

Conscious of the implications of Pangia's wise teaching, I was moved to pose for these and any other indigenous oral sources five questions which must be asked:

What kind or form of oral source is this?

What is the context of this tradition?

What is its territory, span or provenance?

What is its generational depth?

How was the tradition transmitted and what were the circumstances in which this variant was recorded?<sup>12</sup>

Klaus Neumann in his work on Tolai history, notes that the main thrust of this dissertation is to develop a methodology for writing history in Papua New Guinea, laying the ground work for employing oral traditions as historical evidence by analysing their context. He attests to the value of this undertaking and notes that my summary history of the Enga makes up just ten pages.<sup>13</sup>

My dream in 1975 was that even though the ten page overview was only a sketch, an outsider's view,

*... it is indigenous to Enga tradition, it grows out of Enga sources. It is also incomplete, only a beginning, written in the hope that what is begun by a non-Enga can be challenged and remade by younger Enga historians as they build up their history as an integral part of the history of this new young nation.*<sup>14</sup>

Twenty years later, that dream is coming to realisation. Those five questions suggest a methodological pathway through which indigenous voices can be both heard and assessed in the world of academic history. But if we are attentive to who is keeping score, we need to be alert to the colonizing forces at work in the academy, which may be filtering those voices, or even stifling them.

### Constructing The Tolai Past

Klaus Neumann's 1992 study, *Not the Way It Really Was*, has attracted varied and strong attention. Whether or not he was conscious of Said's counsel to make personal inventories, Neumann constructed his writing in a specific way, through which Tolai recorded testimonies are contrasted with a focused series of methodological studies which plot his own movement through this process of inquiry. In his introductory chapter, Neumann proposes:

*The odd-numbered chapters of this book, in which I try to write a history, are all concerned with the colonial past. I have used different forms of presentation and selected episodes to highlight different themes ... In glosses I try to explain aspects of Tolai society as I proceed: what might seem a series of casual remarks to help the non-Tolai reader represents my understanding of crucial features of Tolai society and becomes an important part of my history of the Tolai. The even-numbered chapters try to establish the contexts in which this history has been produced and in which Tolai produce their histories. The odd and even chapters are not aiming at different discourses. My writing throughout is part of an academic discourse. I do not strive to pull together different threads to make one rope, but insist on the virtues of the allusion and advocate a deliberate and shameless eclecticism. In juxtaposing my reading of European authors with my listening to Papua New Guinean story tellers and my understanding of how Tolai view their past with my ideas about how the past could be constructed, I propose points of contact.*<sup>15</sup>

Once more, a historian seeks strategies by which indigenous voices can be heard. He juxtaposes different threads to give space to those voices. The result is that accepted historical categories are questioned and sometimes subverted. But note: My writing throughout is part of an academic

discourse. According to the judgement of Pangia such knowledge and discourse generated by a curious European can create a sense of incompleteness for indigenous story tellers.

Neumann takes this issue further:

*... There are several options for oral historians once they have decided to write history. One is to convey as much of the oral-aural and visual contexts as possible in writing by describing the setting of the performance and transcribing the stories in a way that tells the reader how the words are intoned and which gestures accompany them. [He has chosen that particular option] ... Once history is written in a language different from that which the oral histories used, it becomes much more difficult to convey the spoken word.*

He then grapples with issues about translating from oral texts in native tongues to written texts in the language of writer and reader. With the use of the tape recorder, translators need to strive for an authentic rendering of the oral text. Caution is necessary here, as Walter Ong has stressed: a literate person cannot fully recover a sense of what the word is to purely oral people.<sup>16</sup> He concludes:

*... I have chosen different ways of quoting oral histories: summarising them in my own words or translating them as accurately as possible. This ... [is] an indication of the tension between the desire to let the reader listen to Tolai histories and the realisation that the most the reader can get is my own perceptions and recreations of the histories. I claim to use oral histories as elements of my history rather than as mere raw material.<sup>17</sup>*

Here are deep, troubled waters. The historian constructs his/her work, shaping what is received from raw sources. So when we turn to histories of Pacific Islanders, even those based largely upon indigenous oral sources, whose voices are heard? How do we hear those voices in the written texts, when they are translated into readers' languages and mediated by historians obeying the rules of academia?

Neumann concludes with an affirmation of his stance as a practising oral historian who creates spaces in which Tolai voices may be heard.

*My work has been an exercise in translation and mediation. Tolai concepts needed to be translated so that non-Tolai could understand them. Papua New Guinea languages needed to be translated into English. And a way of thinking that had developed in a particular European culture, within the framework of its language, needed to be mediated for Tolai, for Australian academicians and for an American publisher.*

An exercise in translation and mediation. That is the task of those who seek to accompany Pacific Islanders in processes by which they and their pasts are decolonised, freed and heard, not only in their own islands and tongues, but in larger postcolonial worlds. A bridge, too. This book has not only had to bridge the different contexts in which it developed.

He writes of those contexts: libraries; conversations at men's secluded places on the Gazelle; writing in the shade of an open hut; working on a word processor in the seclusion of a Canberra office; long stretches of relaxed silence; sitting with friends on beach or in the bush. And the task in hand:

*As a professional historian, my task is to construct a past that transcends the present. But this obligation is limited by my affinity to the past and present in question. Historians who recognise such an obligation for themselves have to find their own position between claims such as the claim that the Tolai past belongs exclusively to Tolai and the need to contradict the process of world history with a diversity of nonparochial and shared histories. They are torn between the desire to mediate otherness, and the need to retain it. Professional historians working in Papua New Guinea are privileged to be able to construct the past from written material as well as from the histories women and men choose to tell. Both oral histories and traditions, and written accounts need to be brushed against the grain in a way that does not dissolve the colourful imagery of oral accounts into the rigidity of a historical narrative that*

*knows only one truth, that of the author craving an objective reconstruction of what really was.*<sup>18</sup>

Here the historian is conceived as mediator, translator between cultures and bridge between contexts, as well as one who balances and sustains what is revealed from sources both written and oral. It is through the attentive and skilled oral historian that readers hear the voices of Islanders. What possibilities are revealed and what voices heard if historians work in partnership with a native speaker?

### Historical Vines: Enga Voices

My dream of Enga historians who would build on my work has now come to fruition. Over a decade of intensive inquiry by Polly Wiessner, a German-speaking anthropologist and Akii Tumu, an Enga historian, their work is now reaching publication. In their second chapter they write:

*In reconstructing Enga history from oral traditions, it is possible to draw on a variety of sources, some with a direct historical intent and content and others that are not intrinsically historical but which can shed light on the past ... The oral traditions used will not be outside the reach of the reader - throughout the text we will give translated passages from many of the relevant testimonies ... to convey a feeling of how Enga portray their own history and to document our reasoning. We have also chosen this format because even though it is easy for us to say that some 200-300 cassettes are available for others to use, they rarely will do so. Except for the re-analysis of formalised songs, poetry, formulae or specific testimonies selected by the original investigators, it is hard to work with the material of others, as we discovered in trying to use recordings by Paul Brennan and Roderic Lacey. In the absence of contextual information, subjective impressions, evaluations, non-verbal clues, remarks made after interviews and the possibility to ask questions at the end, testimonies collected by others are difficult to evaluate and interpret. A series of interviews yields far more than texts. Rather it reflects the cultural heritage and life experience of an individual. Without a sense of the person, it is hard to evaluate testimonies and place them in a broader scheme.*<sup>19</sup>

Here is a significant convergence between the strategies of investigators. Each investigator has been able to hear and listen to the voices of Islanders face to face, travelling to the places and contexts inhabited by the Islanders to listen there in the Islanders' own cultural and historical contexts. By donning their walking boots, they engage the protagonists *in situ*, not in texts, libraries or documents, though all these help them to interpret, translate and to understand what is being told.

And each is working as mediator, translator, builder of bridges in partnership. In the case of Polly Wiessner and Akii Tumu, this was a partnership between a curious European and an Enga investigator, working in partnership with Enga tellers. In the other cases an American-educated Chamorro-speaker worked with his Chamorro tellers of tales; a Pakeha worked with Tuhoe and members of Te Kooti's Ringatu faith; and a German historian, writing in English, worked with Tolai tellers.

These partnerships are not exercises in colonial dominance, but reciprocal encounters and conversations between tellers and listeners, questioners and respondents. They can extend over time to those who have travelled these paths of meeting between cultures before. As Wiessner and Tumu propose:

*As a final note when Lacey had completed his investigations of Enga oral traditions as history he wrote, Where, then, are the historical conclusions from these explorations? The answer is that they still lie dormant because more evidence is needed by which claims of origin traditions can be tested and interpreted. Now it is necessary for Enga, with guides and maps like these, to gather evidence together so that the history of their people can be written. This was our goal. We realise that on our journey back through time we have left much ground uncovered and have raised more questions than we have answered. Never-the-less, we do hope that the material presented here will make it possible for Enga to look back into their past and encourage the younger generation to build on our research, just as we have built on that of Lacey, and to go further.*<sup>20</sup>

The outcome of their ten-year cooperation is an investigation of the course of history of selected Enga tribes and clans over the last two hundred years, especially as expressed in changes in the *tee* exchange system, fertility and initiation rituals, patterns of settlement and warfare. Throughout this history the voices of many protagonists, tellers and teachers of traditions are recorded and translated. That fleeting vision I caught in just ten pages became many pages packed with vivid details and people. This may now become a stimulus to exploration, questioning and reshaping by historians, Enga and other. Voices are heard that are mediated and translated; they are voices of Islanders in Pacific contexts beyond empires and in larger spheres. They give us heart and open the lives of Islanders to further conversations and questioning.

1. Mavis Warner Van Peenen, *The legends of Guam*, Guam, 1974; in Vincente Diaz, 'Simply Chamorro: Telling Tales of Demise and Survival in Guam', *Contemporary Pacific*, Spring 1994: 44.
2. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. London, 1994, xiii.
3. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1995, 25.
4. Cf Fiorenza Elizabeth Schussler, *A hermeneutics of suspicion* explores the liberating or oppressive values and visions inscribed in the text by identifying the androcentric - patriarchal character and dynamics of the text and its interpretations. (*But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Boston, 1995).
5. Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks: Selections*, New York, 1971.
6. Said, *Orientalism*, 25, 26.
7. Judith Binney, *Redemption Songs: A Life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki*. Auckland, 1995, 5. See also Angela Ballara, 'Pakeha uses of Takitimuanga: who owns tribal traditions?', *Stout Centre Review* III/Z (March 1993): 17:21.
8. *Ibid.*, 524.
9. *Ibid.*, 4.
10. Roderic Lacey, 'A question of origins: an exploration of some oral traditions of the Enga of New Guinea', *Journal of Pacific History*, 1974.
11. Binney, *Redemption Songs*, 522.
12. Roderic Lacey, *Oral Traditions as History: An Exploration of Oral sources among the Enga of the New Guinea Highlands*, Madison, University of Wisconsin, Ph.D, 1975.
13. Klaus Neumann, *Not the Way It Really Was: constructing the Tolai Past*, Honolulu, 1992, 113.
14. Lacey, *Oral Traditions*, 277.
15. Klaus Neumann, *Not the Way It Really Was*, 48-49. See also Klaus Neumann, 'Not the Way It Really Was: Writing a History of the Tolai (Papua New Guinea)', *Journal of Pacific History*, 1989.
16. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London, 1982, 12.
17. Neumann, *Not the Way It Really Was*, 124.
18. *Ibid.*, 261-2.
19. Polly Wiessner and Akii Tumu, *Historical Vines: The formation of regional networks of exchange, ritual and warfare among the Enga of Papua New Guinea*. Washington, in press.
20. *Ibid.* See also Roderic Lacey, 'Traditions of origin and migration: Some Enga evidence', in Donald Denoon and Roderic Lacey (eds.), *Oral tradition in Melanesia*, Boroko, 1981, 45-55.

## Ulli Beier, Africa, and Decolonisation

Donald Denoon, ANU

From the mid-1960s, Australians in Papua New Guinea often looked to Africa for models for managing decolonisation. This paper questions the relevance of this approach, focusing on Horst Ulrich Beier and Georgina Beier, probably the most successful African imports of that era.

### Natives Becoming Citizens

Stewart Firth argues that 'the Native', invented by colonial ideologues, was an essential concept in colonialism: masculine, child-like and essentialised, he - with his Native Wife - was first the artefact then the focus of policy.<sup>1</sup> The Native had evolved from the Savage, but could he become a Citizen? His community was not yet a nation, inhabiting a territory, not yet a country.

Paul Hasluck, in the Australian 'progressive' tradition, eschewed politics and relied on the technical expertise of an interventionist state to achieve material advance. 'I was virtually the Premier and the whole of a state Cabinet,' he said,<sup>2</sup> and among other things he articulated a vision of post-colonial relations with Australia. To that distant end he set performance indicators and targets for services, and extracted increasing grants to fund them. But material progress and political stability were awkward bed-fellows. Was there such a thing as 'stable progress'? mused an official with a taste for semantics. And what was a suitable term for the not-yet-citizens of the not-yet-nation? Hasluck was uncomfortable with 'Native'. In 1956 he proclaimed:

*[T]here are undoubtedly many unpleasant associations with the term... and a suggestion of inferiority, and these terms are undoubtedly objectionable to maladjusted people like the Indians.*

Neither Papuan nor New Guinean nor Papua-New Guinean would serve, since these terms marginalised Australians:

*the best we can do is to use the term native only as an adjective and to use some care in the selection of the nouns which we place after it.*<sup>3</sup>

So the laws were cleansed of offending terms, but political correctness did not alter the reality of discrimination, and Australian residents were slow to grasp Hasluck's vision. When Julius Chan returned from school in Queensland, and applied for membership of a club in Port Moresby, he was black-balled.<sup>4</sup>

'Educated natives' like Chan touched the boundaries between Natives and Citizens. Papuans were Australian citizens in international law, and New Guineans were Australian protected persons, but neither had a right to enter Australia, since they were not 'constituent members of the Australian community'. They were in effect stateless, and travel was governed by regulations for 'Removal of Native People from the Territory', and permits (not visas, much less passports) were issued only to specific categories of people.

In 1958, the first Papuan tourist blazed a bureaucratic trail. 'Lily Tau' had already visited Australia as a nursemaid. She left her employers to become a typist, but they offered her hospitality. The Administrator approved:

*The girl is a mature type who has adopted European dress and living standards and has saved sufficient money to pay her fare...*

*I can see no objection to granting permission for a native person to leave the Territory in these circumstances, provided that the bona fides of the applicant stand up to close*

*examination and that each application is dealt with on its individual merits following a close investigation into the character, background and motives of those concerned with it and to the relationship between the applicant and the persons in Australia who are to be visited...*

Cleland hoped that 'individual native people [would] build up personal contacts with individual Australian citizens'. The District Commissioner would investigate every application, and Australian officials would conduct random checks on tourists and their hosts.<sup>5</sup> The attention of two governments, two ministers and several police might seem excessive for a three months' visit to a serving police officer. In fact 'Lily' was picking at the seams of both colonial Papua New Guinea and White Australia. Administrative reform could not unravel colonial structures. Only in the 1960s were people allowed to drink alcohol, wear shirts, commit adultery, play rugby, or watch uncensored films - on equal terms with Australians. Although legal barriers fell, there was little inter-racial socialising. Papua New Guineans did not feel at home in Port Moresby.

### **Ulli and Georgina<sup>6</sup>**

Ulli was born in Prussia in 1922, and educated piece-meal in Berlin, Palestine and London. A refugee from Germany and Palestine, he found a haven in London and a home in Nigeria. His fame rested not on his equestrian career, nor his Phonetics degree, nor his Extra-Mural Tutorship at Ibadan University. He was becoming a legendary editor of magazines in contemporary and traditional African literature, creator of artists' clubs, and impresario for African folk-opera. In 1967 he was aged 45. Georgina, much younger, trained as an artist in London, and found her vocation in Oshogbo, working with painters and sculptors with shallow roots in Yoruba society, slight exposure to colonial education, and almost limitless imagination.

Civil war was the spur to taking leave from Nigeria, but other circumstances also suggested a break. The journals *Odu* (historical) and *Black Orpheus* (literary and artistic) were flourishing under Nigerian editors; the Mbari artists' club in Ibadan had run its course; the time had come to let Oshogbo artists organise their own exhibitions and negotiate their own sales. And they wanted to stop being curiosities who had 'gone Native'. New Guinea was still 'the last unknown' for Africans and Europeans. J.H. Holmes's account of his Oroko mission, *In Primitive New Guinea*, was the only relevant book in Ibadan University. In London the Beiers met Anthony Forge who shared their delight in indigenous art; and in Ted Wolfers's United Nations newsletters they read the first political commentary. They were a little better prepared than other new-comers, but not much.

### **The University of Papua New Guinea**

UPNG advertised a lectureship in Third World Literature in such broad terms that Ulli could teach exactly how he wished. 'African Literature' was now a feature of American college courses and even in British universities. It was taught in East and West Africa too - alongside British literature, its centrality not yet acknowledged. UPNG must be remarkably innovative. Efficient too: Ulli's application was accepted by return of mail. Yet the country was so remote that Ulli and Georgina must surely be unknown.

The University bore the imprint of John Gunther, a doctor of alarming temper.<sup>7</sup> He had created the post-war Public Health Department out of the rubble of war, capturing buildings for hospitals and despatching Melanesians to train as therapeutic shock troops. Now he wanted the best possible university, and he wanted it now. Gunther was egalitarian except when he was autocratic. Ulli and Georgina were startled to see Kauage, a labourer, drop in for a beer with Gunther on his way home to barracks. A deranged historian punched Gunther so violently that his teeth and spectacles fell off - and explained 'I love you, you bastard!' Determined to remedy decades of neglect, youthful staff devised imaginative courses.

They combed Australia and Papua New Guinea for students. Vincent Eri was a public servant; Leo Hannet had been expelled from a seminary; John Waiko flew in with an axe and a spare shirt.

Diversity increased when John Kasaipwalova arrived with a background in radical politics at Queensland University. They had few preconceptions about university life, and they could expect glittering opportunities in government. Social distinctions were slow to crystallise: students and staff addressed each other by their first names, and migrants might be undiscovered sculptors. When plays were produced, labourers and lecturers rubbed shoulders in the audience, and on stage. Isolated on the outskirts of town, and bound together in a new enterprise, the community was unusually close.

The University was moving to its permanent site when the Beiers arrived.

*The bleakness of Port Moresby town was awful. Even the University was a rather hideous compound, because there were no fully grown trees, and the rows of ugly houses rose out of what seemed like a desert. Our house was a very depressing and ugly place. The houses were H-shaped, with a long corridor. One side of this corridor was fly-wire. Georgina covered that wall with a huge mural. Papua New Guineans would glance at it shyly, without commenting. (In Nigeria there would have been a big, noisy crowd within minutes.) This was our first clear indication of how different the people were, from Nigerians... Essentially we were trying to conceal the house.*

Frank Johnson was Professor of Language and Literature. Fearing that phonetics might dismay students, he recruited Literature teachers - Ulli and Prithvindra Chakravarti - and linked each Literature course to a Language segment. Thus, according to the *Handbook of Courses*, one first-year course was 'four approaches to the grammatical analysis of English sentences' using R.L. Allen's *English Grammars and English Grammar*, leading to 'the literature of developing countries in English', featuring Amos Tutuola's linguistically anarchic *Palmwine Drinkard*.

The Literature segments had an explicit political purpose.

*Students come out of mission schools with the notion that poetry is an English invention. 'Civilised' countries produce 'literature' while 'primitive' peoples produce 'folklore' which has curiosity value but no literary merit. To counteract these prejudices we started the sequence with a compulsory course called 'Oral Tradition'. Each student had to... collect material which was then translated and analysed.*

*My second assumption was that... English was... imposed on Nigerians, Jamaicans, Kenyans or New Guineans by facts of history. They have to live with it and use it, whether they like it or not. Their success in using this language depends on their ability to twist and modify and adapt the language to their own needs, until it is no longer a foreign tongue.*

Only senior students would read Sartre, Brecht, Ionesco or Shakespeare.

Some students brought their own poems, stories and plays to discuss, but he was reluctant to start a formal class in 'creative writing':

*I was forced into this adventure because my best students couldn't stand the Language segment of the course...*

*Creative Writing must be done very well or not at all; so I attached conditions. Only a small number of students could be accepted, by invitation, if they had shown serious interest in writing. The conditions were necessary because no single teacher can help every promising student... You must be able to tell a student 'You may be a genius, but someone else will have to talk to you about your writing, because it does not evoke a response in me'.*

Students engaged in an unusual relationship. It was rare for a History student to publish an essay, and impossible for a Physicist - but Creative Writing was public property, judged by an audience.



Students were treated individually, and often the teacher had to refrain from teaching:

*If one has more facility with words, it is easy to make the student's work slick, to make it look better and sound better and read better, with more form and shape. But that is precisely what one should not do...*

*A creative writing class is not an effective way to produce professional writers; but it is a wonderful device to build a student's personality.*

John Waiko remembers his expectations when he arrived from an Anglican school, where he had learned to doubt the value of the folk-knowledge which he acquired as a child, and was sadly persuaded that the purpose of education was to learn only the lore of the Europeans. That judgment was shaken by Hank Nelson and Ken Inglis in History; then Literature rebuilt his confidence in his Binandere people and he plunged into Creative Writing. He could develop his ideas in Binandere but needed advice on expressing them in English; then he sought techniques for staging a play in an urban setting. His most powerful device was to incorporate Binandere dance to uncover the tension between village values and the colonial establishment. *The Unexpected Hawk* was one of several plays successfully staged on the campus.

This relationship was not bounded by the classroom: when John brought his father to Port Moresby, they stayed in the Beiers' outhouse. Like many of his peers, he needed advice on English expression. They were frustrated by having to use their second or third language among each other and with authorities. Yet they had to master English if only to vent that anger. Well-wishers assured them that Papua New Guinea would soon be independent, but until each felt confident among other students and with Australians, these assurances rang hollow.

*This was a moment in Papua New Guinea's history when a man had to be highly articulate and capable of formulating ideas, if he was to play a part in shaping the destiny of his country.*

By the end of 1968 there was a flourishing series, *Papuan Pocket Poets*, priced at 60 cents. It included poems from the Pacific, Malay folk poetry, Yoruba hunters' poems, Igbo and Indonesian poetry, and children's poems from around the world. As in *Black Orpheus*, a locally-centred internationalism presented Papua New Guinean writers on equal terms with everyone else. Kovave published stories, poems and plays. These serials, together with Kiki's *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*, Eri's *Crocodile*, Somare's *Sana*, and Ulli's work with Kiki - *Hohao* - suddenly comprised a substantial body of literature.

The books addressed mainly English-speaking readers, but the plays spoke to wider audiences, dealing with issues common to the whole country. Plays were often staged in the open-air, where gardeners and cleaners mingled with academics and students; and they exploited slap-stick satire and solemn dance-drama. Three plays enjoyed wider influence when the Prompt Theatre Company took them to Canberra in 1970. The Minister for Territories sent officers to explain that Papua New Guineans were really grateful to a paternal administration, despite the playwrights. This was not the work of professionals: much of the output was so topical that it has dated. Most writers went on to politics, government, or business; yet a generation who had something urgent to say was empowered to say it trenchantly.

### Off-campus Encounters

Their first contact with a Papua New Guinean bears repetition. In transit at Brisbane airport, Ulli and Georgina and the infant Sebastian were surrounded by public servants, traders, missionaries and all their families. Most were dressed in tropical formal style, so the flamboyant Beiers felt conspicuous. One other passenger was also conspicuous:

*He stood out from the crowd, not just because he was the only black person there, but because he moved with the relaxed self-assurance of a man who has a purpose in life. He*

wore his European clothes casually and as he stood there, alone, holding his briefcase, my wife and I were independently reminded of Ezekiel Mphahlele. Was it merely an outward resemblance, the short, muscular figure, the serious, almost grave expression?... We later found that he had in fact the same passion and warmth, the same capacity for anger, the same outspokenness as our South African friend...

*[When] the loudspeaker called us on board the plane... the Papuan came up and said simply: 'You seem to have rather a lot to carry, let me help you.'*

*Albert Maori Kiki was the first Papuan we ever met.<sup>8</sup>*

A friendship and partnership developed, from which emerged *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*. Working on that, they visited Orokolo (by coincidence, the locale of Holmes's *In Primitive New Guinea*.) They found a cultural revival focused on carved Hohao boards. Carving had lapsed with the influence of missionaries and the departure of young men. In the 1930s the Eravo houses had been razed by Christian converts and the old men had decided, sadly, not to rebuild them: as the young men migrated to earn money, there was not enough manpower for initiation festivals. For forty years there was no carving, until the Catholic priest, Father Compte, made the people revive the tradition.

*The traditional Hohao boards had to be carved according to very rigid conventions... The vocabulary of the artist was very restricted and in judging such a work the people of Orokolo would say: 'it is correct' - rather than 'it is beautiful'.*

*When Father Compte asked the people to carve Hohao boards, they... took great pains to remember the correct designs, but they soon realised that the Father did not know what the symbols meant and was not interested in their function. So for the first time the new artists began to use these symbols as pure 'design', dissociated from its original meaning or function. The boards became less austere, more ornate, sometimes exuberant and baroque. A whole new art form could have developed from this beginning - but there was no community to respond positively, so eventually the activity degenerated into a meaningless tourist art.*

The Beiers had one introduction. Jim Burns, a teacher on Karkar island, subscribed to *Black Orpheus*, and suggested that they meet Alan Nattachee. As a child in the 1930s, Alan boarded at the Catholic school on Yule Island, where he picked up a scrap of paper and was awed to read Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'. He resolved to become the Melanesian Tennyson. During the Pacific War, yaws ate away much of his nose. Disfigurement added to a disturbing presence. Even wearing a golden laurel wreath - bestowed by Poets Laureate International - he was not mocked but nervously respected.

*I was really fond of this Papuan eccentric, but I did not really appreciate his pompous poetry, nor the naive ideas of 'progress' which they contained.*

*I asked him whether he might translate some traditional Mekeo poems for me. One day he appeared at my door with a dozen elderly men: lean and dignified and wrapped in the red laplaps that had become the national dress of the Mekeos. For two hours they sang into my tape recorder, and then listened back to the entire recital.*

*For the next two months Alan came to my house every day to work on the translation. It took some time to persuade him to drop the flowery Tennysonian language and find a form simple and clean enough to do justice to the ancient chants. The result was Aia, a collection of chants in praise of the creator, published in Papua Pocket Poets.*

Another chance encounter was an imposing highlander who worked as an office-cleaner. Kauage wanted to draw, and a friend brought his drawings - imitations of school-book illustrations - to Georgina, who met him:

*he sat on a chair in my house, cradling his head in his arms, twisting his body nervously, bending his toes. His discomfort was enormous. Yet there was a soft desperation... and his smile was beautiful, but it ended in a sigh. In spite of his nervousness this man was impressive. I could not believe that the awful drawings matched the man he ought to be. Then, in a corner of one sheet of paper, I noticed a minute scribble. He said it was a spider. That scribble was the only drawing he hadn't copied. I asked him if he couldn't draw some more spiders ...*

She offered to buy the spiders; then through larger insects to creatures from his imagination; next she taught him to beat relief designs on metal. Metal work absorbed his energy and slowed him down to concentrate on a single enterprise. By 1969 he mounted his first exhibition. The awkward labourer blossomed into a cheerful artist whose exhibitions always sold out.

There was no style for urban living. The dignity of Kauage and other villagers was humbled by mission styles or trade-store clothes, living in barracks or squatter settlements, relying on broken English or Pidgin. Georgina met Marie Aihi during a visit to Yule Island mission. At eighteen she was working in the mission clinic, among her own people but isolated by growing up in the mission. Georgina brought her to town and encouraged her to channel her sense of design into screen-printing. As she prospered, her kin increased their demands; and Marie lacked the villagers' skills in dealing with these demands.

Georgina recorded the climax:

*In July 1970 a festival was held in Marie's village, Waima... The dancers were magnificently decorated... with superb face paintings in yellow, red and black. They danced throughout the night and the next day and another night... But while this was going on, the village teenagers [organised] an electric guitar band to which they danced Westernised dances... Marie divided her attention between the two, though she felt ill at ease in both... She allowed her face to be painted in yellows and reds and wore a traditional grass skirt, but compromised by tying her hair with a red chiffon scarf and wearing plastic earrings. She appeared like a stranger in her own village... After the festival she travelled back to Bereina, in an open truck through a coconut plantation. A coconut suddenly fell on the truck and grazed Marie's head. She was not really badly hurt but became convinced that sorcerers had made the coconut fall on her head and that they probably meant to kill her.*

She withdrew from screen-printing, gave away her possessions, and returned to village obscurity. She had, however, launched a small revolution in urban styles. Georgina's other proteges went further, through Harahara Prints, marketing new textile designs. Harahara did not flourish for long, but it did arouse an appetite for adapted traditional designs.

The end of colonialism left many people in an affluent setting which they had not the money to enjoy, grasping a heritage which was difficult to adapt but impossible to escape, facing choices which a conservative regime had long denied. Ulli and Georgina developed **individual** relationships, but they also brought isolated people together so that each reached out to the others - in textiles, poetry, books, paint, or copper.

At first sight Ulli and Georgina can be seen as contributing towards decolonisation and even nation-building on a Nigerian model. Ulli observes:

*It was no accident that Kiki's Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime was written by the secretary of Pangu Pati, because the birth of Literature was part of a process of political awakening. The poems, plays, biographies and fiction that followed Kiki's book in rapid succession were part of a general process of self-examination. The writers fulfilled an important political function: they helped to raise the level of political consciousness on and off the campus. They forged links with the young politicians and with Highland workers.*

Closer inspection suggests another agenda. Australians rather than Melanesians saw Africa as an analogue: Australians appointed Ulli, and it may be symbolical that he met Albert Maori Kiki in Brisbane. Papua New Guineans were not displaced Nigerians: there was no counterpart to the ancient urban Yoruba milieu, the English-speaking intelligentsia and their newspapers. It was Yoruba culture in fin-de-siecle mode which offered scope for Ulli, Georgina and their artist friends. Ulli was much more directive in relation to Papua New Guinean poets than Soyinka or Achebe would tolerate. Ulli had never taught literature to African undergraduates, nor would any African university endorse his syllabus. Nor was the contrast sharp only among elites. Folk-opera was inconceivable in societies with no paying audiences. The closest African analogy lay through Georgina to the artists of Oshogbo, who also emerged from no indigenous tradition of painting or sculpture.

The Beiers' successes owed more to the experience of a Jewish child in Weimar Germany. The collapse of Wilhelmine constraints allowed a window of creative opportunity until the Third Reich slammed it shut. Ulli's, and Georgina's, values were grounded in suspicion of all government authority, especially as it affected artists. In their clearly stated view, the best time to be an artist is the interval between an old and a new orthodoxy. That mind-set was confirmed by Ulli's adolescence in Palestine under a collapsing British colonialism and before the triumph of Israel. It was entrenched in Nigeria, where the most favourable environment for Soyinka, Twins Seven Seven, Muraina or Achebe was the twilight of colonialism rather than the daylight of independence. In Papua New Guinea in the 1960s they took unalloyed pleasure in breaking the colonial silence; for those few years they could consign to a remote future their anxious expectation of new orthodoxies.

1. Stewart Firth elaborates this notion in 'Colonial Administration and the Invention of the Native', and Vicki Lukere explores the 'Native Wife', both in D. Denoon, S. Firth, J. Linnekin, M. Meleisea and K. Nero (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, Cambridge, 1997.
2. Paul Hasluck, *A Time for Building: Australian Administration in Papua New Guinea, 1951-1963*, Melbourne University Press, 1976.
3. Australian Department of Territories archives, A 452, 62/3210, Minister's minute, 27 January 1956.
4. *South Pacific Post*, 6 April 1962.
5. Cleland to Department, 8 September 1958.
6. The following sections are based on interviews with Ulli and Georgine from 1975 onwards. I have the transcripts, and have been trying to transform them into a biography. Unless otherwise indicated, italicised quotes are from these interviews.
7. John Gunther's career was recorded in interviews with Hank Nelson at UPNG during his Vice Chancellorship. His impact on public health is discussed in D. Denoon with K. Dugan and L. Marshall, *Public Health in Papua New Guinea*, Cambridge, 1988.
8. Introduction, A.M. Kiki, *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*, Brisbane, 1968.

## **Decolonising the History of Australia's South Sea Islanders: politics and curriculum materials**

**Clive Moore, University of Queensland**

In early November 1996 two booklets arrived in the mail: they were the final draft of an AusAID and Queensland government-sponsored curriculum project begun in 1994, part of a package of reconciliation benefits arranged by the Federal government for Australian South Sea Islanders. The first contains fifty-eight pages of stories and activities for primary schools; the second, sixty-six pages of text intended for use in secondary schools. Both were written in collaboration with Australia's South Sea Islander communities.<sup>1</sup> These curriculum materials provide a wide variety of sources on the history and present-day life-style of the Islander communities, the descendants of some 50,000<sup>2</sup> Pacific Islands indentured labourers brought to Queensland between 1863 and 1904, predominantly to work in the sugar industry but also in the colony's pastoral and maritime industries up until the 1880s.<sup>3</sup> When the published material finds its way into the Australian school system it will be the product of a very drawn out process of consultation between historians, teachers, the Education Department bureaucracy, and the Islanders themselves, including individual and family contributors, community reference groups and teachers. While these materials will be valuable in allowing students and teachers easy access to teaching resources useful for all levels of the primary and secondary system, the final product also has its own history. The booklets represent the interface between decolonised Pacific scholarship and the decolonisation of the Australian South Sea Islander community which, since the mid-1970s has sought and achieved recognition as a unique and disadvantaged Australian ethnic group. In this process they have also asserted their right to contest interpretation of their own history.

Liberating itself from the apron-strings of Imperial history, 1950s and 1960s Pacific history became Island and Islander-centred, but not necessarily Islander-written. In the 1970s and 1980s another stage of historical decolonisation began, as Pacific Islanders began to train and work as academic historians, and Pacific Islander individuals and communities became involved in publishing historical projects. Incorporating Pacific Islander viewpoints into curriculum materials destined for schools is another necessary step in the process of producing Islander-centric history. Scholarly interest in the South Sea Islander community dates back to B.II. Molseworth's 1917 University of Queensland MA thesis<sup>4</sup>: since then a huge literature has developed on the topic, which in many ways has been quite crucial to the development of modern Pacific history.<sup>5</sup> Earlier documentary studies were augmented by fieldwork in Australia and Melanesia in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>6</sup>, which began to uncover differences in interpretations between academic historians, descendants of Queensland's 'Kanakas' in the islands, and the Islander communities in Australia. These differences have become pronounced, as Australian Islanders pursued a political agenda, part of which was to decolonise control of their history, asserting their rights to be the dominant interpreters of their collective past.

### **The Fight for Recognition**

The 1970s and 1980s were also quite crucial to the Islander community in several other ways. They were propitious decades for collecting oral testimony: the last of the original 'Kanaka' generation had died and the older Islanders realised that it would soon be too late to recall much about their past. They cooperated willingly with academics attempting to collect and store oral testimony, to ensure that their history could be preserved for future generations. The 1970s were also the beginning of the re-linking between the remnant Australian community and their kin and linguistic groups in Melanesia. What were once grand adventures when the Corowa, Mussing, Enares, Bobongie and Fatnowna families first re-established the connections with their islands of origin, have now become common-place yearly visits back and forth across the Coral Sea. The two processes, academic interest in the community and re-linking with the islands, revived Islander interest in their history and culture. At the same time the Australian media also 'discovered' the Islanders, placing considerable stress on injustices and ill-treatment suffered last century, but also giving the

Islanders a voice and a sense of identity and cultural resilience.<sup>7</sup> Several Australians of South Sea descent, particularly Faith Bandler, Nasuven Enares and Noel Fatnowna, had political and media profiles which were used to the Islander communities' advantage. Allied to this was the emergence of substantial Islander published histories in biographical, family history and novel forms.<sup>8</sup>

Also in the mid-1970s the Islanders began to organise politically to confront State and Federal governments with demands for recognition as a separate ethnic group and compensation for past and present disadvantages. Modern Islander politics emerged in the heady Whitlam days in the first half of the 1970s. The expansion of financial benefits provided for indigenous Australians in the 1960s and 1970s brought to the boil long-term antagonisms between the South Sea Islander communities and Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Despite the mixed immigrant/indigenous ancestry of many Islanders they were accused of trying to get access to indigenous benefits illegally. Although most local officials turned a blind eye to distinguishing 'Islander' descent, South Sea Islanders began to be removed from executive positions and even membership of indigenous organisations, and by 1974 Commonwealth policy was that South Sea Islanders' were ineligible for any special financial assistance.<sup>9</sup>

Some early South Sea Islander activists had been involved in the struggle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights or worked in indigenous organisations. For example, Patricia Corowa worked in the office of Gordon Bryant, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Evelyn Scott worked for Aboriginal Hostels, and Olive Darr ran an Aboriginal Housing Cooperative in Ayr. The doyen of Islander activists is Faith Bandler, co-founder of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship in 1956, the forerunner to the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement. Born in 1918 to an Islander family from Tumbulgum in northern New South Wales, Bandler through the circumstances of her adult life in Sydney knew influential Australians such as Lady Jessie Street, along with many politicians. Bandler became Federal Secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and a crucial leader of the 1967 referendum campaign to enable the Commonwealth government to include indigenous Australians in the national census and to legislate for them. Bandler was an influential driving force behind the referendum campaign and the face that charmed the Australian public. As Barry Cohen relates:

*During the campaign Bandler addressed hundreds of business and community organisations, public meetings and rallies, and appeared endlessly on radio, television and in the print media selling the message that the time had come to "do something" about the plight of the Aboriginal people. It was an extraordinary performance.*

*It was not the number of appearances she made but the manner of those appearances that won over non-Aboriginal audiences. No matter how hostile, ignorant, stupid or racist the question, her response was always the same. The slight pause and then the beaming smile followed by a polite, patient, articulate and detailed answer.<sup>10</sup>*

Faith Bandler may have been identified by Australians as of indigenous origin, but she is proudly of Ambrym Island, Scottish and Indian descent.<sup>11</sup> As recounted in a television interview in 1994, she turned her formidable talents to help her own people fight for recognition:

*I became interested in my own people after the Referendum and I discovered that some of them were fronting up as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in order to receive those benefits which flowed on as a result of the Referendum. I was saddened by that and I feared that they would lose their identity. They were in this country through no choice of their own and the very fact they have suffered racial discrimination in the same way as the Aborigines had placed the Islanders in a very special category. They are perhaps the most deprived of all groups now in Australia. And they have been deprived socially, equally as much as the Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines.<sup>12</sup>*

After a casual discussion with Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1973, Bandler decided that the Islanders needed their own national organisation, which she formed in 1974. Although there are now many regional South Sea Islander organisations, the Australian South Sea Islanders United Council (ASSIUC) was the first of any substance, and remains the only national organisation. During 1974 ASSIUC branches were

established in metropolitan centres and towns along the coast of northern New South Wales and Queensland. ASSIUC's inaugural meeting took place in Tweed Heads in January and its first national conference was held in Mackay in May 1975. The Mackay conference drew delegates from major Islander communities – Mackay, Ayr-Home Hill, Rockhampton, Townsville, Gladstone, Nambour, Bowen, Tweed Heads, and from Sydney and Canberra. Mackay's *Daily Mercury* reported ASSIUC's principal aims as:

- \* To provide a national council to be a forum and a voice for the Australian-born descendants of those South Sea Islanders brought by force as indentured labour or who came voluntarily to work in Australia before 1906.
- \* To gain official recognition for South Sea Islanders by the Australian, State, territorial and local governments as a disadvantaged minority group.
- \* To get legislation passed which will provide the additional assistance necessary to enable South Sea Islanders to attain equality of life with other Australians.
- \* To provide communication centres for education purposes, both universal and specialist, to overcome the social and economic handicaps which now exist in the South Sea Islander community.
- \* To provide the opportunity to acquire housing and other shelter of the standard required by South Sea Islanders.
- \* To combat racial discrimination and other prejudices.
- \* To foster mutual understanding and respect between South Sea Islanders and other Australians.
- \* To create programmes designed to activate the creative and technological needs of South Sea Islanders.<sup>13</sup>

Prompted by an ASSIUC delegation to Canberra, the Federal government set up an Interdepartmental Committee to report on the Islander community.<sup>14</sup> The 1977 report was insufficiently researched, claiming only 3,000 to 3,500 South Sea Islanders, when there were that number in Mackay district alone, the 1970s total community probably numbering 10,000 to 15,000. However the general conclusion was correct:

*Their socio-economic status and conditions have generally been below those of the white community thus giving the group the appearance of being a deprived coloured minority.*<sup>15</sup>

The report found that 37% of those surveyed lived below the poverty line with a further 12 per cent living close to the poverty line, when the figure for the total Australian community in 1973 was 12.5%. While recognising this disadvantage and that some South Sea Islanders were receiving special benefits intended for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, the report did not recommend extending these benefits as a right to the Islander community, stressing that they should be made more aware of existing benefits and programs for the wider Australian community. The only other relevant government initiative in the 1970s came through the 1977 Royal Commission into Human Relationships, which reported that the majority of Australians regarded South Sea Islanders as indigenous but that they were denied indigenous benefits. The Royal Commission recommended that 'action should be taken to extend to them eligibility for benefits now available to Aborigines',<sup>16</sup> but the recommendation was never implemented. Despite valiant attempts by Senators Jim Keefe and George Georges, and Al Grassby as Commissioner for Community Relations, to criticise the inept IDC report,<sup>17</sup> the 'life was not meant to be easy' philosophy of the government meant that Islanders were stripped of most defacto access to indigenous benefits and left to fend for themselves.

Although ASSIUC continued to exist in name, it had no political force, beset from its beginning by internal family and district rivalries which characterise the community.<sup>18</sup> The only positive 1970s response came, unexpectedly, from the Queensland government: in 1975 Queensland recognised South Sea Islanders as a "distinct ethnic group" and the next year appointed Noel Fatnowna as a Special Commissioner for Pacific Islanders, within an Aboriginal and Islander Commission, a position he held until, disillusioned by the manipulations of the Bjelke-Petersen government, he resigned in 1983.<sup>19</sup> Then in 1988 Queensland gave South Sea Islanders full access to the indigenous programs of its Department of Community Services.

This unsatisfactory state of affairs continued until the 1990s. In 1990 Faith Bandler once more mobilised her extensive contacts to make another attempt to seek justice for the Islanders. The result was a February 1991 report by the Evatt Foundation on the current situation of the Islanders, based on fieldwork by Nasuven Enares. This was followed by a revival of ASSIUC and a national conference in Townsville at Easter the same year. The 1991 report recommended that South Sea Islanders be recognised as a disadvantaged ethnic group, acknowledged for their contribution to building the nation and their long-term support for the rights of indigenous Australians. The general conclusion was that they were in need of the same types of special benefits as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>20</sup> The Evatt Foundation made eight recommendations including special legislation, special benefits and a much needed more detailed survey. This survey occurred at the request of Attorney-General Michael Duffy in August 1991, under the auspices of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Colin Menzies was commissioned to undertake a survey and census. His excellent December 1992 report, *The Call for Recognition*, based on extensive contact with the Islander communities, informative newsletters, and use of a census modelled on the 1991 Australian census, collected direct information on 4,435 Islanders. Menzies estimated their total number as between 10,000 and 20,000, many of whom actually identified as indigenous Australians. More than half had Aboriginal or Torres Strait forebears, their ethnic identification depending on where they lived: in Torres Strait, in mainland Aboriginal communities, in the old sugar districts, or as individuals or families scattered through east coast urban and rural Australia. His conclusion was that 10,000 to 12,000 Australians self-identified as South Sea Islanders.

Although the younger generation are staying at school longer than did their parents, and 6.7% had university or TAFE education, Menzies' report showed that educationally, compared with other Australians, the Islanders consistently under-achieve. Around one-third of self-identified Islanders had received Abstudy while completing their education, but about one-quarter of the Abstudy recipients had no indigenous ancestry. South Sea Islanders were also found to have an unemployment rate that was two and a half times the national average and despite their participation in indigenous housing cooperatives for more than twenty years, Islanders had a home ownership rate of less than half the national average. Almost one-sixth of Islander households were tenants of the Queensland Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. Their dwellings were 50% more crowded than the Australian average.

The Islanders have remained mainly manual workers.<sup>21</sup> Menzies concluded that Islander women were in more skilled occupations than indigenous women, but Islander men tend to be in less skilled occupations than indigenous men. The 1992 average income for all Islanders who had left school was \$270 and half received less than \$249 per week. In 1992 the average Australian female weekly earnings were \$397: only one-third of Islander women received that much; and Australian women in full-time work received an average of \$530 per week, a figure equalled by only twenty per cent of Islander women. Islander men were worse off: only one-sixth received more than \$598, the average Australian male weekly earnings; and only one-tenth of Islander men in full-time employment earned more than the \$665 Australian male average. They were also more likely to be involved in seasonal work, and taking this into account "South Sea Islanders were almost as poor on average as Aboriginal people".<sup>22</sup> Menzies described the Islanders as "a black minority group that has lived on the fringes of white society, getting irregular, mainly manual work" and suffering "persistent and pervasive poverty".<sup>23</sup> His forecast was that now or within the next few years South Sea Islanders would replace Aborigines as the poorest community in Australia.

In an unrelated move, the Australian government created a new ministry: Gordon Bilney took office as Minister for Development Cooperation and Pacific Islanders Affairs, and showed considerable interest in South Sea Islanders, partly motivated by the political flack he had received from the governments of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands who told him to deal with the problems of their Australian kin. Bilney originally proposed "an act of reconciliation with Australian South Sea Islanders and the countries of their ancestors"<sup>24</sup>, but was quietly persuaded that this was inappropriate. His vision of a totally kidnapped people perpetuated the immigrants' 'victim status', which fitted badly against modern scholarly concepts of 'Islander agency';<sup>25</sup> and wiser diplomats blanched at the possibility of having to organise Melanesian propitiatory ceremonies with offerings of shell-wealth and sacrificed pigs. A quieter, saner path was sought.



Between the 1992 report and the final Commonwealth recommendations, as their response, the Queensland government mobilised to help the Islanders through the Ministry for Housing, Local Government and Planning, and the Bureau of Ethnic Affairs. Housing conferences were held which led to the formation of South Sea Islander housing cooperatives. Less successfully, the Bureau of Ethnic Affairs set about 'social working' the Islanders into Regional Councils, a well-meaning but disastrous bureaucratic interference which created incorporated organisations capable of administering government funds, but cut across the already numerous district-level Islander-initiated organisations.<sup>26</sup> Local and State government funding also established newsletters, *Wan Tok* at Mackay, and *Nuise Blong Yumi* in Rockhampton, intended to help network between individuals and government agencies.

Faced with such a damning report at a time when reconciliation with indigenous citizens was a central philosophy of the Keating government, and encouraged by Bilney, in August 1994 Attorney-General Michael Lavarch introduced a package of special benefits specifically for Australia's South Sea Islanders. Ninety-three years after attempting to deport all Islanders the Commonwealth recommended that they be formally recognised as a "unique minority group which is severely disadvantaged as a consequence of racial discrimination" and that government agencies should consider this forgotten group of Australians a "high-need group in equal opportunity, access and equity programs". Watched by representatives of the Islander communities in the visitors' gallery, Lavarch told the House that:

*Like Faith Bandler's father, they were often brought against their will. In other words, they were treated no better than slaves. This is the ugly truth of the matter. This sorry chapter in Australian history was referred to as blackbirding, which is of itself an obnoxious term.*

*No other group came to Australia with less status than did the South Sea Islanders...They are not indigenous, nor are they descended from mainstream settler migrants. Their historical experience in Australia has generally been one of lack of control over their own affairs and exclusion.<sup>27</sup>*

Specific recommendations were made to provide schemes comparable to Abstudy and other educational support programs, and to appoint two community liaison officers for three years. The final recommendation was to increase general Australian awareness of the Islanders and their role in the nation's history. This involved setting up a Cultural Awareness Awards Scheme to assist Islanders to visit their islands of origin to re-establish family and cultural links<sup>28</sup>, preserving heritage sites, establishing a travelling museum exhibition<sup>29</sup>, and developing school curriculum materials.

### **Curriculum Politics: Decolonising History?**

When the invitation arrived to participate in the Queensland-based curriculum project Max Quanchi, Steve Mullins, Sharon Bennett and I jumped at the chance. For me it was a way of returning to the Islander community some small part of what they have given to me in friendship and in my academic life over the last two decades. Despite valiant attempts to diversify my academic career, like John Wayne and Western movies I have become type-cast as an historian of the Queensland labour trade. Max Quanchi, representing the History Teachers' Association, had the broad Pacific history and school curriculum development skills needed. Like Doug Munro before him, Quanchi had become fascinated with Queensland's South Sea Islanders – the fate of Pacific historians who move to Queensland. Steve Mullins had expertise in Torres Strait history and curriculum development: based in Rockhampton he was able to link in with the central Queensland Islander community. Sharon Bennett, representing the Geography Teachers' Association, had skills in geography and education, combined with a secondary teaching background.

The committee managing the curriculum project was an astute mix of Education Department managers, representatives of professional teachers' associations, and the Islander communities. Planning stages used Brisbane-based conferences and tele-conferences, with the project manager travelling extensively amongst the Islander communities explaining the project and the absolute necessity of their involvement in the development process, both conceptually and practically. The Islanders on the committee were not expected to be experts in curriculum development, but to liaise with their communities, collect materials and act as a conduit to the central committee and the writers. We work-shopped what we wanted to cover overall and

ended up, two years later, with two booklets of materials. The first, in two sections, was designed for primary schools: illustrated Islander stories for early childhood classes, and modern Islander family-based stories and histories for upper primary students. The second booklet was for secondary schools, again at two levels, for lower and upper level students. In the final draft of the secondary materials Clive Moore, Max Quanchi and Sharon Bennett share equal authorship, but in earlier drafts Quanchi and Bennett worked on the first part under Moore's critical gaze, and Moore wrote the second half, tempered by the wise counsel of Quanchi and Bennett.

The lower secondary materials covered eleven themes: why were South Sea Islanders introduced into Australia in the nineteenth century?; key events in Islander history; what is heritage and what is worth keeping for future generations?; the Commonwealth's Deportation of the Islanders (1901-08); going to war; playing sport; going to church; a comparison of working lives in 1895, 1935 and 1995; going home to the islands; the call for recognition as a unique and disadvantaged ethnic group; and four Islanders expressing their ideas about the future. The upper secondary materials covered only three themes: was labour migration a process of kidnapping or did it involve voluntarism?; racism, conflict and oppression; and lobby groups, power and the call for recognition. The materials are well illustrated with photographs and cartoons. When the drafts were presented to the communities only the secondary materials came in for major criticism, to an extent that at one very fraught committee meeting the politically sensitive Education Department officers considered holding them back for further revision, while issuing the unproblematic primary booklet.

Several issues were intertwined in the brouhaha. First was the political empowerment of the Islander community, for which they had fought for twenty years, 1974-1994. In 1994 they achieved their most remarkable political success since 1906.<sup>30</sup> In the 1990s Commonwealth and State governments caved into pressure and promised to right some of the very obvious wrongs done between 1863 and 1994. The 1990s Islander communities, although largely ignorant of the 1906 success, were justly proud of their 1994 victory and saw control of interpretation of their own history in Australia as part of their achievement.

Terminology and imaging were also problematic. Contemporary Islander opinion is divided over the use of 'Kanakas' and 'Blackbirding'; some want the words expunged from the English language, while others have used "Kanakas" in the titles of their organisations and in public displays. 'Blackbirding' is often used to mean the entire 1863-1904 labour trade, as well as specifically to describe 'kidnapping'. We chose to use 'Islanders' or 'South Sea Islanders' as the general textual terms, but it is impossible never to use nineteenth century words which appear in quotations. There were objections to using verbatim quotations in Pidgin English from the 1906 Royal Commission, which many of today's Islanders (who have little knowledge of Pidgin) viewed as demeaning, and likewise there was discontent over use of cartoons from last century which either depicted their forebears as savages or uppity natives mimicking Europeans.

Another problem was the total mismatch between their view of their history and that of Moore and Quanchi, whose view was academically informed by primary research and hundreds historical items which in full or in part discuss the history of Australia's South Sea Islanders in last century and this. This was particularly evident when it came to the kidnapping versus voluntarism debate. We presented the now standard view: that indenture is not slavery. Kidnapping certainly occurred and should be condemned, but the majority enlisted willingly, the process involving very active agency by the recruits and passage masters. We also used the term 'cultural kidnapping', meaning that Europeans were decidedly taking cultural advantage of the Islanders' desires to obtain new technology, and loosening the bonds and demands of small scale societies. They became more speedily upwardly mobile in their descent groups when, and if, they returned. What we stressed was that history is about interpretation and there will always be different views of the historical process, even different accounts of the same event. The upper secondary unit begins by saying that:

*The activities in this unit are based on the premises that students should be confronted with different interpretations and that the study of history is an exercise in making judgements about what might have happened in the past.*

Although most Islanders acknowledge some degree of voluntarism, most also believe that kidnapping

continued right through to the 1890s and 1900s, and that "indenture" is another word for "slavery". They are largely uninformed by academic history, having absorbed their knowledge from stories recounted by older family members, from local history sources, from the numerous Islander-authored histories published in recent years, and from the media. Most non-academic sources present the labour trade as the equivalent of kidnapping and slavery and the Islanders as victims, never expressing 'agency' in shaping their lives. The Islanders' perceptions of their forebears' participation in the labour trade, as expressed in their own words throughout the project, stress kidnapping and slavery. They largely fail to comprehend arguments about myth and interpretation in history, and fail to distinguish between their contemporary political agenda – which is based on being victims of the historical process – and objective assessment by outsiders. One example is the insistence of the Islanders on the Committee that their forebears were "brought to Australia", not, as Quanchi and Moore suggested, that they "came" to Australia.

The Islanders are at odds with academic historians in numerous other ways. They have tried to insist that what they see as negative aspects of their history not be presented. Their vision of Melanesia is almost that of tourist brochures: an idyllic island life-style, where food is plentiful and violence and brutality are rare, or only provoked by wicked Europeans. What I hoped was a complex explanation of the differences between European racism and ethnic prejudices held by the Islanders against Europeans, Aborigines and other Melanesians, was severely criticised. The communities want to suppress any reference to antagonism between Islanders and Aborigines, embarrassed by their forebears' excesses last century and, despite their indigenous ancestry, their alienation from indigenous groupings today. Perhaps the most horror was reserved for 'bachelor families'. In one section we dealt with the Melanesian family and the overwhelmingly male environment in which Islanders lived in Australia last century: only about six per cent of labourers were women, and even with marriages to Aboriginal women and some others, most of the Islanders lived in a totally male world. We thought that, without stressing the obvious, we would describe their relationships as 'bachelor families' which offered security and friendship. The present-day community is unwilling to contemplate what they see as a slur on the sexuality of the first Australian generation.

There have also been problems with management and editing the project. There can be no doubt that the Education Department managers progressed along a steep learning curve when dealing with Islander community politics. They had not fully anticipated the deep divisions and rivalries between regions, political groupings, island groups, families and individuals. The project has also been very Brisbane-centric, and despite its exemplary design and rhetoric of equality, there has been more than a degree of not always subtle manipulation. Although an effort was made to involve experienced academic and curriculum development personnel, no similar attempt was made to seek out the most qualified Islanders. While the Islander representatives by-and-large did an excellent job of liaising with the regional communities, their appears to have been no real guiding principle in their selection, and some communities questioned the committee members' right to a mandate to speak on their behalf. Some committee members saw their involvement as a chance to boost the prestige of their own families; and having succeeded, disappeared.

The authors always ended as 'whipping boys' for the project, despite the Islander community not providing necessary materials to represent their opinions, and the Education Department manager, in an attempt to be impartial, not providing enough support. In the main meeting when the drafts were discussed, there was no attempt to justify or support academic decisions, and there was what seemed to be deliberate sabotage of our endeavours. We always knew that we were dealing with contested views and had intended to alleviate this by letting into the text statements and comments produced by the community, which would provide an alternative view and enliven our words. This we had announced in a frontispiece requesting comments and explaining that we intended working these into the materials as alternative views. Strangely, this note had gone astray when the draft went out to the communities, which led to unnecessary antagonism and ill-feelings. The most benign interpretation is that gremlins dwell in the photocopier of the Queensland Education Department.

The editors and the staff of Education Department's Equity Unit were other unanticipated loose cannon on our labour-trade schooner. Outside contractors, totally anonymous and uncontactable, the editors produced visually attractive text but also made uncalled for alterations beyond their brief. Some changes requested by

the authors and the Islander communities went undone, while the editors decided to make improvements of their own. Sentences and paragraphs moved around the text, sections changed place. Barely a sentence escaped. Take for example my section on the contentious issue of whether the Islanders were slaves. Having spent two paragraphs succinctly defining 'slavery' and describing the end of importation of slaves into British territory in 1808 and the end of slavery itself in 1834, along with explanation of origin of the indenture contracts used in Queensland, which are plainly different from slavery, I found slipped into the final draft: 'However, this somewhat benign view of indentured labour in Queensland is contested by members of many ASSI communities.' The lack of communication with the editors is lamentable and may have caused considerable damage to the final product.

Late in the debate the Education Department Equity Unit decided to weigh in. Armed with self-righteous knowledge of correct-speak they decided that the whole approach used in the secondary booklet was lamentably Eurocentric. They had no knowledge of the history of Australia's South Sea Islanders, but presumed the Islanders were an extension of the indigenous community and decided that what we said was complex explanation was negativity. While they were correct to suggest some changes, leaving their waspish input until mid-December 1996 when the whole project was due at the printers by the end of January 1997 was hardly welcome.

What does all this mean to the production of curriculum materials and to politics in the Australian South Sea Islander communities? After twenty years of dealings with the Islanders I had few illusions regarding the Melanesian political process as it has survived in this immigrant community. I was very aware of the internal dynamics, between regions, families, individuals and political groupings. What I had not really anticipated was the antagonisms and resentment towards individuals such as myself who are identifiable as academic gate-keepers. That I have published more than thirty chapters and articles, as well as other substantial works, and that I hold probably the largest personal archival and photographic collection on Australian's South Sea Islanders, has certainly been of use to the curriculum project. But equally, my academic knowledge opened me up for criticism and jealousy. This is complicated by my seeming identification with the Solomon Islander minority, particularly with Malaitans and with Melanesians at Mackay, which has also alienated the Islander majority who are of New Hebridean descent, and those from other regions who want stress put on their own areas and families.

The main points under debate in building these materials centre around the ownership of history and the political empowerment of the South Sea Islander community. A close inspection of the materials clearly shows the inner tensions between the Islanders' current political agenda, their quest for empowerment and recognition, and their understanding of their history, balanced against attempts by historians, geographers and educators to accommodate the communities' views while maintaining academic integrity. By insisting on their victim status, particularly by concentrating on the kidnapping/slavery issue, the Islanders have not decolonised their history and largely have conducted a politically naive campaign, albeit successful. Admittedly, the kidnapping/slavery card is the most emotive and explosive, and inflicts maximum political embarrassment. But their fixation on debatable nineteenth century issues, at the expense of a much stronger argument for compensation based on discrimination this century, and the low socio-economic standing of the contemporary community, has meant that they have not presented a fully nuanced case.

They succeeded largely because they were dealing with a Labor Federal government bent on reconciliation with indigenous Australians, and a Queensland Labor government supportive of national endeavours. This conclusion is backed by the decline in government support since the coalition returned to power in Queensland and federally.<sup>31</sup> Government compassion has also declined due to the frustration of dealing with a divided Islander community which is its own worst enemy. There really is no united Australian South Sea Islander community: it is a figment of the bureaucratic and academic imagination. Other than Faith Bandler, who is now elderly and has always been an individual not a team player, there are no recognised unassailable national leaders. Other leaders have operated successfully only at a regional level, or like Nasuven Enares have been side-lined through petty jealousy from less competent competitors.

I learned more about the politics of education bureaucracy than that of Australia's South Sea Islanders. I

hope that the product is worth while and is used in the schools. In the long haul we produced a valuable resource for use by Australian students, which provides a sensitive history of one important immigrant community, and allows them to be proud of their achievements in Australia. Once the shouting is over, I hope we have gone some way to fulfil the desires of this quite unique ethnic community to be recognised as integral and valued in the development of our nation.

1. AusAID and the Queensland Department of Education, *Australian South Sea Islanders: stories and activities for primary schools*, Brisbane, 1996; and *Australian South Sea Islanders: a curriculum resource for secondary schools*, Brisbane, 1996.
2. Around 62,000 indenture agreements were made but as many Islanders travelled to Australia more than once the number of individuals is much lower.
3. Clive Moore and Trish Mercer, 'The Forgotten People: Australia's South Sea Islanders, 1906-1993', in *Race Relations in North Queensland* (Henry Reynolds, ed.), Townsville, 1993; Patricia Mercer, *White Australia Defied: Pacific Islander settlement in north Queensland*, Townsville, 1995.
4. B.H. Molesworth, *The History of Kanaka Labour in Queensland*, MA, University of Queensland, 1917.
5. Clive Moore, "Revising the Revisionists: the historiography of immigrant Melanesians in Australia", *Pacific Studies*, XV, 2, 1992; Doug Munro, "The Labor Trade in Melanesians to Queensland: an historiographic essay", *Journal of Social History*, XXVIII, 3, 1995; and, "Revisionism and its Enemies: debating the Queensland labour trade", *Journal of Pacific History*, XXX, 2, 1995; and "The Pacific Islands Labour Trade: approaches, methodologies, debates", *Slavery & Abolition*, XIV, 1993.
6. Robert Tan, an MA student from the University of Queensland, interviewed 19 South Sea Islanders in 1960 but never completed his research or published his findings. Tom Dutton and Peter Corris collected interviews in 1964 and 1967 and since 1973 Trish Mercer and Clive Moore have collected an extensive bank of Islander testimony, now part of the Black Oral History Collection, Department of History and Politics, James Cook University.
7. 'The Islanders', Peach's Australia, ABC TV, 1975 (published as 'The Islanders' in Bill Peach, *Peach's Australia*, Sydney, 1976); 'The Forgotten People', ABC Radio, 1978 (published as *The Forgotten People: a history of the Australian South Sea Island community*, Clive Moore, ed., Sydney, 1979); 'Forgotten People', ABC TV Big Country, 1978; 'Kidnapped', SBS TV, 1989; "Return to Vanuatu", SBS TV Dateline, 1993; 'Australian Biographies - Faith Bandler', SBS TV, 1994; 'Sugar Slaves', ABC TV, The Big Picture, 1995.
8. Faith Bandler, *Wacvie*, Adelaide, 1977; and, *Welou My Brother*, Glebe (NSW), 1984; and *Turning the Tide: a personal history of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*, Canberra, 1989; (Faith Bandler with Len Fox), *Marani in Australia*, Adelaide, 1980; and *The Time Was Ripe: a history of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (1956-69)* (Faith Bandler and Len Fox, eds.), Sydney, 1983; Thomas Lowah (with illustrations by Ray Crooke), *Ede Mer (My Life)*, Kuranda, 1988; Noel Fatnowna, *Fragments of a Lost Heritage* (Roger Keesing, ed.), Sydney, 1989; Mabel Edmund, *No Regrets*, Brisbane, 1992; and *Hello, Johnny!: stories of my Aboriginal and South Sea Islander family*, Central Queensland University Press, 1996; Jacqui Wright with Francis Wimbis, *The Secret: the story of slavery in Australia*, Bundaberg, 1996.
9. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), *The Call for Recognition: a report on the situation of Australian South Sea Islanders*, Sydney, December 1992; S. Mullins *et al.*, *After Recognition: access and equity for Australian South Sea Islanders*, Rockhampton, 1996.
10. *Australian*, 2 October 1996.
11. Faith Bandler Interview, 26 November 1975, Tape DeB893, Hazel de Berg Recordings, Oral History Collection of the National Library of Australia.

12. 'Australian Biographies - Faith Bandler', SBS TV 1994.
13. *Daily Mercury* (Mackay), 10 May 1975.
14. The committee was convened under the chairmanship of the Department of Social Security under the Whitlam government and continued under the Fraser government.
15. *South Sea Islanders in Australia: report of the Interdepartmental Committee*, Canberra, 1977, 4.
16. *Commonwealth Royal Commission into Human Relationships*, 1977, 46-7.
17. The Hon. A.J. Grassby, Commissioner for Community Relations, Synthesis of Comments and Criticism of the South Sea Islanders in Australia Report of the Interdepartmental Committee, 1977, 8 December 1978; Senator Jim Keefe, *Senate Debates*, 13 September 1978, 529-30.
18. Moore and Mercer, 'The Forgotten Immigrants', 234-39, analyses ASSIUC.
19. The Commission was disbanded in 1984, replaced by an Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council, whose functions and membership did not include South Sea Islanders.
20. The Evatt Foundation, *Australian South Sea Islanders: a report on the current status of South Sea Islanders in Australia*, Sydney, February 1991.
21. Half the men were labourers and another quarter tradesmen or machine operators. 40% of the women were labourers, cleaners or shop workers, one-fifth were clerks and one-sixth were teachers or (mainly) teachers' aids.
22. HREOC, *The Call for Recognition*, 61. Other statistics are from 38-65.
23. *Ibid.*, 38-39.
24. *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 12 June 1993; *Daily Mercury* (Mackay), 23 July 1993; *Age* (Melbourne), 21 September 1993; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 September 1993.
25. These concepts are more fully explored in Max Quanchi, 'National Imaginings, Victims and Agents: the call for recognition by Australian South Sea Islanders', European Society of Oceanists Conference, Copenhagen, December 1996. Also David Chappell, 'Active Agents Verses Passive Victims: decolonised historiography or problematic paradigm', *Contemporary Pacific*, 1995, VII, 2.
26. Bureau of Ethnic Affairs, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, *Australian South Sea Islander Summit*, Mackay 1993, Brisbane: Bureau of Ethnic Affairs, 1993; Conference - '93, Cooe Bay 13/14 February; Seli Hoo '94: a gathering of Australian South Sea Islanders from regions across Queensland, 24-25 September 1994, Alligator Creek Youth Centre, Mackay.
27. Michael Lavarch, *House of Representatives Hansard*, 25 August 1994, 397-98.
28. Advertisement for South Sea Islanders Cultural Award Scheme 1994-1995 Awards, *Weekend Australian*, 15-16 October 1994; Provisional Guidelines for Applicants, Australian South Sea Islanders Cultural Award Scheme, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1994.
29. Australian South Sea Islanders: A Touring Exhibition from the Australian National Maritime Museum, sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1994.
30. In April 1906 Queensland instituted a Royal Commission to inquire into the Commonwealth's 1901 deportation order. Harry Tonga and Alick Mallicoola voyaged from Mackay to Melbourne on behalf of the Pacific Islanders' Association and were granted two interviews with Prime Minister Deakin to plead their case, during which Deakin promised some exemptions to the blanket deportation order. Clive Moore, *Kanaka: a history of Melanesian Mackay, Port Moresby*, 1995, 274-91; *Truth* (Brisbane), 6 January 1907.
31. In 1996 the Commonwealth Department for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs reneged on its commitment to fund South Sea Islander Community Development Projects. *Wantok*, XIX, December 1996.

## Whose Initiative: Getting Out or Pushing Out

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The South Pacific provides examples of each of the four possible combinations of metropolitan pull and indigenous push.

- *no pull, no push*. The metropolitan government and indigenous leaders both want colonial rule to continue. The Northern Marianas, for example, opted to remain with the US while its neighbours opted for 'free association'. American Samoa is currently neither pulling, nor pushed.
- *pull and push*. Both sides want the relationship to end, as in Kiribati or Nauru (Pollock, chapter 12).
- *pull without push*. The metropolitan government might want to leave and local leaders want it to stay, as in Fiji in the 1960s (Lal, chapter 4).
- *push without pull*. There are examples of this normal nationalist story in Nauruan opposition to Australian colonial rule, and in the Vanua'aku Pati's declaration of a Peoples Provisional Government in the colonial New Hebrides in the late 1970s, where the British were pulling, but the French were not (Ambrose and Morgan, chapters 6 and 7).

In practice, preferences for 'push' and 'pull' changed through time, partly in response to each other, while the local side rarely spoke with one voice. A focus on metropolitan-local push and pull also misses two other levels of analysis. First, there were 'network effects', in which (for example) British policy towards the Pacific was determined by early policy towards the Caribbean, which disenchanted Britain with 'free association'. Second, decolonisation was an intrinsically international process because it created new, internationally recognised, states. Other states could determine the terms on which they recognised the new entrants to the system. The specifically international characteristics of decolonisation in the South Pacific included

- a declining threshold of what was internationally regarded as viable, so that smaller and smaller states became acceptable as independent;
- acceptance of fine gradations of sovereignty, such as free association, or independence without UN membership;
- tolerance of tokens of sovereignty as a resource (tax havens, the sale of stamps, passports etc);
- some willingness to recognise the results of freely chosen breakups of colonial territories (as in the breakup of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, or the separation of Kiribati and Tuvalu). There was little international sympathy for Bougainville secession, however.

### Explaining Decolonisation

Here I look at some explanations offered for the process of decolonisation. I am less interested in whether they are right or wrong than in the types of explanation they offer, to whom or what they ascribe agency, and so on. I have chosen surveys that include more than one country.

In chronological order, Davidson<sup>1</sup> refers to the world setting, to the actions of island leaders, and to the environment of the islands (small, poor etc.). Larmour<sup>2</sup> refers to the inequality of the two sides in negotiating decolonisation, and to the relationships between the negotiators and their respective domestic constituencies. Macdonald<sup>3</sup> contrasts the decolonisation of Oceania with other parts of the world, and finds 'a critical factor in the decolonization of Oceania is the smallness of the dependencies.'<sup>4</sup> Bertram finds decolonisation 'promoted and designed more by the metropolitan powers than by local initiative,'<sup>5</sup> and marked by closer integration with metropolitan growth poles.

Firth<sup>6</sup> explains decolonisation in terms of the strategic interests of the colonial powers, modified by their ability to resist external pressure, and (in Australia's case) domestic racism that ruled out the option of free association which Firth's explanations would otherwise predict. Ghai finds the decolonisation of the region largely driven by the interests of the colonial powers, often against local resistance, and sees constitutions running ahead of indigenous political forces, promoting rather than containing change.<sup>7</sup>

Gaffaney is the most theoretically elaborate.<sup>8</sup> He refers to the strategic interests of states, and the calculations they might make of the costs of governing colonies, compared to the costs of alternatives. He asks if a theory of colonisation also works backwards as a theory of decolonisation, and finds it does not: the calculus of state interests that explains the colonisation of Micronesia does not explain its ending (but see Petersen, chapter 10). Dependency and unity of local elites, and local and international moral pressures need to be factored in to a more complex explanation of decolonisation.

The writers differ according to the emphasis they give to structural conditions, and agency, and they have different ideas about where agency lies:

- in the colony (Davidson, especially)
- in the metropole (Ghai and Bertram, especially)
- in empire/ network effects (Macdonald, especially), or
- in the international system itself.

They posit different kinds of agent, collective or individual. For example, men are the agents in Davidson's work, while states are agents in Firth and Gaffaney's. Communities - Indian and Fijian - are often treated as agents in discussing decolonisation in Fiji, as are social movements such as the Mau in Western Samoa, or Maasina Ruru in Solomon Islands. Even God is agent in some accounts (Liua'ana, chapter 5).

### **Power in Decolonisation**

One way of thinking about the question of agency or initiative is as a question of power. Gaffaney, for example, found 'real agency and power in the periphery'. A paradox of the process of decolonisation is the radically different quantities of power apparently available to the metropole, compared to the colony, yet the appearance is given that 'the little guy won' or 'the mouse roared'.

This disjunction between resources and outcomes, might be explained in several ways:

- the colony played a weak hand better;
- the colony had more leverage on the ground;
- the issue was more salient to the colony than the metropole;
- the colony had powerful allies;
- the outcome in fact benefited metropole rather than colony; or
- inequalities were mitigated by the juridical equality of states.

Colonial negotiators were new to the game, though they could employ skilled negotiators like Yash Ghai. The colonies certainly had more at stake, so they might put more effort into the exercise. They had allies, as in the support Vanuatu nationalists found in the UN. Australia was generally supportive of Britain's withdrawal from Solomon Islands, and French and British withdrawal from Vanuatu (though not French withdrawal from New Caledonia, see Small and Douglas, chapters 8 and 9). The US, on the other hand, was more on the colonial side than it had been in, say, Africa.



The issue may hinge on what is meant by 'power', and its relationship to force. It is exercised against resistance: if both metropole and colony want decolonisation, or neither do, then power is hardly being exercised. So the two logical possibilities of pull/push and no-pull/no-push do not seem to involve power. By the same token, resistance must be possible: if New Zealand were to arrest and deport the population of Tokelau they would be using force rather than power.

Power is not a universal quantity, but characteristic of a relationship (France is powerful in relation to New Caledonia, rather than to the US). Decolonisation has been both a domestic and an international process, and states look inwards to the societies they claim to govern, and outwards to other states.<sup>9</sup> Metropolitan governments faced at least two domestic constituencies, in the colony, and at home. So we might ask of each, how powerful it was

- in relation to pressure from within the colony,
- in relation to pressure from within the metropole,
- in relation to other states (eg the US ), and
- in relation to the international system.

In the period of decolonisation, all five metropolitan governments were democracies at home, and so to a similar extent subject to domestic political pressure (if it were mobilised). France was distinctively vulnerable in that voters, indigenous and settler, in its Pacific colonies could also vote in France. All had introduced some form of democracy within the colony, though their Governors/Administrators/High Commissioners were not responsible to the elected legislatures. They were weak against extra-parliamentary pressure in their colonies, particularly if it could attract attention where they were vulnerable - in the international arena, and though the media at home. The US became particularly vulnerable to political pressure in its colonies, after Peace Corps lawyers opened up opportunities for local people to litigate against the US. The big difference between the colonial powers was probably in relation to international pressure: the US most able to resist it; Australia and New Zealand least, and the UK and France somewhere between.

A distinctive combination of strength and weakness may go some way to explain different decolonisation policies; or the possibility of having a 'policy' rather than surrendering to the inevitable. Britain, for example, was less reactive in the South Pacific than it had been in Africa. Hugh Tinker wrote critically in 1968 of the idea that 'decolonisation was planned in any sense'. Instead, he said, British governments 'worked to one rule only: identify the leader, then hand over to him'.<sup>10</sup> By 1973, however, they were planning, or at least going through the motions of an interdepartmental Programme Analysis and Review, which identified its preferred policy as 'to relieve IIMG of direct responsibility for as many as possible of the remaining territories'.<sup>11</sup> The Programme Analysis and Review survived a change of government and was implemented completely in the South Pacific during the 1970s.

There are other forms of power than the ability to get someone to do something they would otherwise not want to. Stephen Lukes identified two:<sup>12</sup> the power to set the agenda, so that disputes do not emerge to be resolved by the visible exercise of power, and the power to change peoples' ideas, by education or advertising, so that the visible exercise of power, or the manipulation of agendas is no longer necessary. Colonisers often had power to set the agenda, and whether or not 'decolonisation' was on it. Independent media were often absent.

Ideas could be changed. For example, the British Programme Analysis and Review, under the headline 'good faith', noted that British governments had promised to be guided by 'the wishes of the peoples concerned', but went on to suggest that

*if local wishes are opposed to the course favoured by HMG's interests, it is surely our task to seek to change them, using appropriate information programmes and, if necessary,*

*economic inducements or deterrents. This could apply to territories reluctant to seek independence.*

### **Decolonisation as Reversal or Culmination**

To what extent do we need to explain decolonisation? The prefix 'de-' suggests a reversal, so that to explain decolonisation we need first to explain colonisation. The same factors might be present (economic interests, military power, racist thinking, international support) but acting in reverse. Thus, for example, British decolonisation is often explained as an historical reversal: changed economic interests, declining military power, anti-racism, and loss of support in the UN. Gaffaney addressed this question of the symmetry of colonisation and decolonisation, and showed clearly that in Micronesia decolonisation was not colonisation put it reverse: it was more complicated, and additional factors came into play (local elites, moral issues).

At the doctrinal level, decolonisation is in some ways the culmination of colonisation, rather than its reversal or extinction. In the idea of trusteeship, decolonisation is immanent within colonisation - though it may take a long time (and much of the Pacific debate was about timing, rather than outcome). Trusteeship in the Pacific was not only a self serving colonial doctrine, but an international legal framework within which the activities of some, but not all, the colonial powers were regularly scrutinised, and which (in the absence of other interests) loomed large on some official horizons.

Hood's framework<sup>13</sup> for understanding policy reversals helps isolate this self cancelling character of colonisation. Trying to explain why public administration theory changed so radically from Keynesian and progressive assumptions in the 1980s, Hood identified four kinds of explanations:

- changing interests;
- changing environment;
- changing ideas;
- the decay or self destruction of policies from within.

The decolonisation of the Pacific provides examples of each. First, the balance of interests changed. New commodities became more valuable. Other countries became more powerful. New domestic forces had less interest in empire. New governments owed debts to different constituencies.

Second, the environment changed. Technological changes made coaling stations and (later) airports less significant, and locations for testing nuclear weapons more important.

Third, ideas changed. The racist thinking that underpinned imperialism was discredited after the second World War. There were new ideas about the possibilities of development, and the role of the state in achieving it.

So far so good. Hood's fourth kind of explanation is perhaps the most interesting. He argued that some policies were not simply discredited by changing interest groups, environments or new ideas. They also contained the seeds of their own destruction, and decayed - as it were - from within. Thus, in Hood's examples from the Keynesian welfare state, nationalised enterprise created its own unexpected pathologies such as poor customer service that helped discredit it, while free medical care led to continual increases in demand for health services.

Colonialism has its own self destruct mechanisms. It creates the forces that eventually supersede it: arbitrary colonial territories that become national spaces; racist ideas that create anti-white or non-racist reactions; ideas about human rights and democracy that subvert authoritarian colonial institutions; educated elites ready to replace colonial administrators; and local entrepreneurs who come to demand protection from foreign companies.

1. J.W. Davidson, 'The Decolonization of Oceania - A survey 1945-70'. Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 1971.
2. P. Iarmour, 'The Decolonisation of the Pacific Islands' in R. Crocombe *et al* (eds) *Foreign Forces in Pacific Politics* Suva, 1985.
3. B. Macdonald, 'Self determination and Self Government', *Journal of Pacific History*, 1982.
4. Macdonald, 'Decolonisation and Beyond: the Framework for Post-Colonial Relationships in the Pacific', *Journal of Pacific History*, 1986, 120.
5. G. Bertam, 'The Political Economy of Decolonisation and Nationhood in Small Pacific Societies', in A. Hooper *et al* (eds), *Class and Culture in the South Pacific*, Suva, 197, 16-29.
6. S. Firth, 'Sovereignty and Independence in the Contemporary Pacific', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 1989, 75-96.
7. Yash Ghai, 'Constitutional Issues in the Transition to Independence', in R. Crocombe *et al* (eds), *Foreign Forces in Pacific Politics*, Suva, 1985; and 'Reflections on Self Determination in the South Pacific' Faculty of Law Working Paper 12, University of Hong Kong, 1994.
8. T. Gaffaney, 'Linking Colonization and Decolonization: the Case of Micronesia', *Pacific Studies*, 1995.
9. E.g. T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.
10. H. Tinker, 'Decision Making and Decision Faking' (Review of J.M. Lee 'Colonial Development and Good Government') *Government and Opposition*, 1968, 264.
11. United Kingdom, 'Programme Analysis and Review 1973: the Future of the Dependent Territories. Report by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Overseas Development administration, Ministry of Defence', London.
12. S. Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, London, 1974.
13. C. Hood, *Explaining Economic Policy Reversals*, Philadelphia, 1994.