Ron Crocombe: E Toa!
Pacific writings to celebrate his life and work

edited by
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Foreword

While working in the Cook Islands, Ron Crocombe met and married Rarotongan Marjorie Tuinekeore Hosking, beginning a life-long partnership that established, developed, and fostered an ‘extended’ family throughout Oceania, on the Pacific Rim, and around the world. Their networks linked scholars, indigenous experts, officials, artists, bureaucrats, business people, and many others, creating synergies that fostered and produced more and more studies about the Pacific. Through the years, the Crocombes’ pace of research, writing, and publishing did not slacken, setting an example for others to follow, particularly in fostering collaborative research between scholars and ‘non-scholars.’ They encouraged study about anything and everything Pacific.

This book is divided into broad categories of land, politics, history, and culture, showing the wide-ranging interests of the Crocombes and the writers they inspired and encouraged. As to be expected, many chapters discuss the Cook Islands, where the Crocombes returned year after year and based themselves in ‘retirement.’ Other chapters analyse and discuss the historical, cultural, linguistic, political, and other kinds of links radiating throughout our region. The chapters range from discussions of particular topics to discussing Ron himself.

This very Pacific book is an example of the cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, all-encompassing way in which Ron and Marjorie worked. Whether you read the book as a whole or according to your individual interests, you will gain insight into how Ron and Marjorie have helped the development of Pacific peoples and nations. And their deep love of those.

It is a splendid and marvelous tribute to Ron and Marjorie, showing the respect and aroha/aloa the authors have for them.

Emeritus Professor Albert Wendt ONZ CNZM
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From the New Guinea Research Unit to the National Research Institute

R.J. May

THE EARLY YEARS

Shortly after the establishment of The Australian National University (ANU), in 1953, three ANU academics — Oscar Spate, Cyril Belshaw, and Trevor Swan — were invited by the Australian government “to investigate the economic structure of the Territory [of Papua and New Guinea] 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” (Spate et al. 1953). Although research was not a particular concern of the group, it did note in passing that “knowledge and informed discussion [were] probably lacking” in relation to the formulation of social objectives of policy in Papua New Guinea (PNG), and it called for “careful research and thoughtful thinking [sic]” as a foundation for intelligent social and economic policy. Eight years later, in 1961 — five years before the establishment of the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) — ANU’s Research School of Pacific Studies (RSPacS), then under the directorship of Sir John Crawford, created the New Guinea Research Unit (NGRU). Its mandate was “to carry out work on problems of an inter-disciplinary nature which have both practical importance and scientific interest.”

The unit had an executive officer (David Bettison), initially based in Canberra, and a research fellow (Nigel Oram) looking after operations in Papua New Guinea. Operations in Papua New Guinea included assistance to ANU staff and other visiting foreign researchers. Bettison and Oram were joined in 1962 by a young Ron Crocombe, who had recently completed his PhD at ANU, on land use and tenure in the Cook Islands. NGRU was “controlled” (the word used in contemporary ANU documents) by a committee comprising Professors Sir John Crawford, J.A. Barnes, and J.W. Davidson and Drs Harold Brookfield and David Bettison. Bettison headed NGRU until 1965 when Crocombe replaced him as field director in Port Moresby.

NGRU original premises in Port Moresby were two galvanized iron sheds in the depot of an oil exploration company in the industrial suburb of Badili, opposite the Burns Philp staff clubhouse. With some partitioning and the installation of ceiling fans, one shed was converted into offices while the other served as a library. A house had been acquired for the foundation field director on nearby Three Mile Hill, but when Bettison departed in 1965, NGRU was moved there; the underfloor area was walled in to create offices while the upstairs was used as accommodation for visiting researchers. In 1968 the unit moved to a new building complex at Waigani, across from the newly established UPNG. There was a small general staff, mostly Papua New Guinean, led (from 1964 to 1973) by a field
manager Jim Toner. Toner retains fond memories of Ron Crocombe. “He had no time for the diversions and irrelevant activities favoured by other academics,” Toner recalls, “and once wrote, ‘The work of this Unit is to do research and publish the results;’” an injunction which Toner affixed in large letters on the inner door of his office.

The 1960s were exciting times in what was then the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. Although the Australian government at that time was slow to accept the Territory’s imminent progress to independence, some people saw the inevitable change coming and sought to facilitate it. Following the report of a United Nations Visiting Mission led by Sir Hugh Foot in 1962, which criticized Australia for its lack of clear planning, the pace of change quickened. The Legislative Council was replaced by a part-appointed, part-elected House of Assembly and Papua New Guinea’s first national general election was held in 1964. The public service expanded and localized, efforts tried to increase the output of cash crops — particularly smallholder coffee — and various initiatives identified and supported local entrepreneurs. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) was invited to carry out an economic survey of the Territory, and its report (commonly referred to as the “World Bank report”) was published in 1965. The journal New Guinea and Australia, the Pacific and South-East Asia (often shortened to New Guinea) was launched in the same year under the editorship of Peter Hastings and actively sought contributions from Papua New Guinea’s emerging nationalist elite. A Papua and New Guinea Society was also formed at this time and generated further discussion of constitutional and other issues. Dr H.C. Coombs, governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, set up a Papua New Guinea Department in the Bank’s head office in Sydney and a branch in Port Moresby and began sponsoring a number of Papua New Guineans through universities in Australia and subsequently UPNG, which took in its first students in 1966. NGRU was energized by and contributed to, this growing momentum.

The unit’s early research focus was on land use and productivity, and internal migration and urbanization (subjects that remained central to the unit’s work throughout its existence), and emphasis was placed on “the interdisciplinary and applied character of the Unit’s work.” Contributors to this research included, as well as Oram and Crocombe, Dawn Ryan, Nancy Bowers, L.L. Langness, Diana Howlett, Anton Ploeg, and Sachiko Hatanaka; they worked with local informants. Illiome Taru conducted research supported by NGRU at Crocombe’s initiative, well before Papua New Guineans were formally appointed to NGRU staff. A grant from the Rural Credits Development Fund of the Reserve Bank of Australia boosted research on subsistence agriculture and cash cropping, with early studies by Peter Krinks, Ian Fairbairn, Bob Kent Wilson, Ben and Ruth Finney, and Eric Waddell.

Following the World Bank report of 1965, and the subsequent appointment of an economic adviser (Bill McCasker) to the Australian administration, two major papers produced in Port Moresby (TPNG 1967, 1968), broadly endorsed the IBRD’s recommendations (which in fact embodied little change of direction from existing policy) and sought to set the course for future economic policy. Many saw these as favouring expatriate-led development.

1 Toner later became the first field manager of ANU’s North Australia Research Unit in Darwin which was largely modelled on NGRU.
"He had no time for one recalls, "and once an injunction which

of Papua and New strategy change coming and visiting Mission led by at planning, the pace of appointed, part-elected al election was held in ose the output of cash inland and supported d Development (IBRD) d its report (commonly The journal New Guinea notes" was launched very sought contributions and New Guinea Society constitutional and others, set up a Papua New in Port Moresby and diversities in Australia and NGRU was energized by activity, and internal migrants' work throughout its 3rd applied character of the as Oram and Crocombe, Anton Ploeg, and Sachiko Farua conducted research in Papua New Guineans were Credits Development Fund's agriculture and west Bob Kent Wilson. Ben and subsequent appointment of as uration: two major projects the IBRD's recommendations existing policy) and sought toavouring expatriate led deve

d development over indigenous participation in the cash economy, and there followed a lively debate about economic development strategies, in which Crocombe and others from ANU and the Reserve Bank of Australia took a prominent part. Crocombe argued for greater emphasis on Papua New Guinean participation in the economy, and was supported in this by Reserve Bank economist Pike Curtin, by John Kaputin, and by others. (See Fairbairn, this volume.)

In 1964 NGRU coordinated a major study of the elections for the first House of Assembly. This was the first of an unbroken series of studies of Papua New Guinea's national elections, in which NGRU and subsequently the Institute for Applied Social and Economic Research (IASER) and the National Research Institute (NRI), along with ANU and other international scholars, have been continuously involved.

From the start, dissemination of research by unit staff and others was seen as an important function of NGRU, and in 1963 the first issue of a long series of New Guinea Research Bulletins was published, on The Empirical Mechanical Farming Project, by Crocombe and G.R. Hogbin. By October 1969, the unit had produced 32 New Guinea Research Bulletins, with Crocombe author or joint author of four of the first seven. Bulletin 32 provided a detailed survey of social science field research and publications from 1962 to 1967. Later, a series of summaries of selected monographs, in simple English, Tok Pisin, and Hiri Moru, was added, and in 1975 a discussion paper series.

In 1967, on Crocombe's initiative, NGRU, UPNG, and Administrative College collaborated in organizing the first of the celebrated Waigani Seminars. Toner recalls that an approach was made to the Burns Philp staff club committee to hold the seminar in the staff clubhouse opposite NGRU, but that "members were wary of an intellectual invasion until [Toner] pointed out the benefits to their luncheon bar trade." A selection of papers from the first Waigani Seminar, which was on New Guinea in Transition; indigenous participation in business, industry, politics and society, was published as New Guinea Research Bulletin No.20. The Waigani Seminars came to provide an annual focus for debate about a range of issues in the lead-up to independence in the Melanesian states.

Following Crocombe's departure for the newly established University of the South Pacific in 1969, the NGRU directorship was taken over by New Zealand geographer Marion

1 Research Unit in Darwin, who


3 The first Waigani Seminar, in 1968, was on the history of Melanesia; the third, from which three papers were published in New Guinea Research Bulletin No.35, was on the indigenous role in business enterprises; subsequent seminars addressed politics in Melanesia (1970), change and development in rural Melanesia (1971); priorities in Melanesian development (1972); law in Melanesia (1973), education in Melanesia (1974); the Melanesian environment (1975), and agriculture in the tropics (1976), and all have resulted in substantial publications (see references at the end of this paper). Additionally, the seminars did not always happen annually, but some significant publications resulted from them. In the 1990s the Waigani Seminar died out, but when revived in 2008, Crocombe returned as a keynote speaker and helped to reframe the proceedings. Living History and Evolving Democracy in Papua New Guinea 1964-2008. A list of the Waigani seminars is available at <http://www.pnguwi.com/600/technology/information/waigani/WaiganiSeminar1967-1997list_published.pdf>.
Ward, and in 1972 by Ron May, who was recruited from the Reserve Bank of Australia to become the unit's fourth, and last, field director. By then, the NGRU establishment had peaked at eight research fellows, one research officer, and three research assistants. In 1974, the unit appointed its first Papua New Guinean academic, Bejo Bess Daro, who produced a discussion paper on Josephine Abaijah and the Papua Besena movement.

In the 1970s, and particularly after the election of Gough Whitlam as prime minister of Australia, the movement towards independence in Papua New Guinea accelerated. Following the 1972 election, Michael Somare became chief minister of the first fully elected government of Papua New Guinea. Self-government followed in 1973 and independence in 1975. The new government lacked experience but had enthusiasm and vision. In seeking to draft and carry out an ambitious agenda of reform and democratic consolidation, the Somare government sought expert advice from a variety of sources, including NGRU researchers: David Stone became a permanent consultant to the pre-independence Constitutional Planning Commission (CPC); Ross Garnaut was a member of the Bougainville Renegotiation Team and the Tariff Advisory Committee before being seconded to the Department of Finance in 1975; (now Dame) Marilyn Strathern assisted in the preparation of village courts legislation and some aspects of law reform; Diana Conyers was attached to the Central Planning Office to help organize district planning in Morobe and subsequently helped establish the provincial government in Bougainville and the Village Development Task Force; May served on the board of the Bank of Papua New Guinea and provided some assistance to CPC; and the unit was part of a government-led Joint Programme of Studies in the Transport Process, which Marion Ward had helped initiate. NGRU also collaborated with UPNG in a major nationwide study of internal migration and urbanization, which had significant policy implications.

UPNG itself became a hive of nationalist rhetoric and activity, drawing committed scholars from around the world. The annual Waigani Seminars in the 1970s attracted prominent international speakers, emerging Melanesian political leaders, and large crowds of students and interested locals. The 1972 seminar had as keynote speakers Ivan Illich, René Dumont, and Lloyd Best, and included on the programme many of the emerging nationalist leaders of the region.

In 1973 then director of RSPcaS Anthony Low, who had come to ANU from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, wrote of NGRU: "There has been no more successful socio-economic research institute in a third world country during its period of terminal colonialism." But with independence approaching, and UPNG still established, it was decided within RSPcaS that maintaining NGRU in Papua New Guinea was no longer appropriate, and initiatives were taken to hand the unit over to the PNG government. The Institute of National Affairs, a private sector think tank that has contributed substantially to the discussion of policy issues over the years, had its first meeting in the seminar room of NGRU in 1974.

The Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research
During 1974-1975, discussions were held with relevant parties in Papua New Guinea, and legislation was drafted for a Papua New Guinea Institute of Applied Social and Economic.
Research. The transition was accomplished in 1975, and IASER was formally launched on 1 January 1976. IASER was governed by a council, initially chaired by Bank of Papua New Guinea governor Sir Henry To Robert, which reported to the Minister for National Planning and Development. May was invited to stay on as foundation director of the new Institute.

As its first major activity, in 1976 IASER organized a seminar attended by representatives from government departments and agencies, colleagues from UPNG, and members of the private sector to discuss research needs and priorities. The wide-ranging discussion helped to define the early IASER research agenda endorsed by the IASER council in 1976. This focused on (1) population, with specific reference to demography and the effectiveness of family planning programmes; (2) assessment of government services, with special reference to extension services; (3) organizational bases for local development, including local and provincial government and development associations; and (4) rural development, with specific reference to implementation of land policy, constraints on economic development and rural outmigration. It was also noted that although questions of macroeconomic policy appeared not to have been given high priority at the seminar, a vigorous effort should be made to recruit someone with skills in this area (May 1976; IASER 1981).

May was succeeded in 1977 by UPNG economist John Conroy, who was in turn succeeded in 1982 by UPNG geographer Richard Jackson. By 1980, research staff numbers had risen to 26, with 16 expatriate staff and 10 national staff. Among IASER's early national staff were Mel Togolo, Aruru Matiabe, Kundapen Taliyaga, Ila Temu, Anton Goie, Moea Vele, and Chris Haiweta. During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, IASER consulted regularly with government and a substantial part of IASER's funding came from research conducted on behalf of other government departments and agencies.

In 1984, the directorship was localized with the appointment of Bougainvillean Ephraim Makis. Makis was tragically killed in an apparent raskol (rascal, bandit) attack and was succeeded by historian John Waiko. Waiko resigned in 1992 and was elected to the National Parliament in that year. He was succeeded by Wuli Lamo. Lamo resigned in 1994 to contest a national by-election, and was replaced by Ila Temu as acting director, but Lamo returned in 1995 for a further term after failing to gain the seat.

**The National Research Institute**

In 1980, there was a move to incorporate IASER within the National Planning Office, but support was substantial for maintaining its independence — including support from the Prime Minister for National Planning Bebes Kororawo — and it remained an independent entity. Three years later, the scope of IASER was expanded by the transfer of the Education Research Unit from UPNG, and in 1989, the National Executive Council approved a change of name to National Research Institute — a title formalized by legislation four years later. In 1994, NRI also absorbed the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (created in the early 1970s under the direction of Ulli Beier) and the National Film Unit, but the following year these two bodies were returned to the National Cultural Council.

During the 1980s and 1990s, much of IASER/NRI's research focused on the national economy, integrated rural development projects and community development projects;

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**OMIC Research**

parties in Papua New Guinea and the state of Applied Social and Economic
demography and internal migration; decentralization and local government; law and justice issues; conservation; and developments in the forestry sector. The Division of Education Studies also maintained a steady flow of education research reports. Among a number of international scholars who contributed to this research and policy dialogue as members of IASER were Michael Walter, Alan Stretton, Ngo Van Lam, Louise Morauta, Patrick Townsend, Joe Peasah, Andrew Axtine, Anthony Regan, Sinclair Dinnen, and Colin Filer. Visiting researchers also contributed to IASER’s output. However, competition for skilled national research staff intensified during the 1990s and 2000s, at the same time as the research capacity of government departments and agencies has declined, and this has limited NRI’s ability to respond to the demands on its resources from government and outside-funded consultancies.

In 1998, NRI survived another attempted move to terminate the independent research institution, when the economic adviser to the Skate government, Pirouz Hamidian-Rad, proposed the abolition of several statutory bodies as a cost-cutting measure. This proposal was eventually resisted, and Hamidian-Rad was later arrested on charges of misappropriation. Five years later, the work of NRI suffered a further setback when its director, Beno Boeka, was accused of financial mismanagement. Richard Jackson returned briefly as acting director before the appointment of Dr Thomas Webster in 2004.

Webster, an educationist who had also served as acting administrator of the Western Highlands Province and executive director of the UPNG Open College, quickly reinvigorated NRI, securing assistance from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) for a new building programme (the NGRU building in 2004 was much as it had been when constructed in 1968), several research advisers under the Advisory Support Facility (including May, who returned to NRI for several months in 2005-2008), and funding for its research programme.

From 1996 to 2011, NRI comprised four research divisions: Economic Studies, Political and Legal Studies, Social and Environmental Studies, and Education Studies. In 2011, however, the institute was reorganized to fall in line with the pillars of Papua New Guinea Vision 2050 (National Strategic Plan Taskforce 2009) and to facilitate interdisciplinary research. Its research activities are now organized under three “pillars” (human capital); Wealth Creation (wealth creation, natural resources, and growth models); and Institutional Strengthening (institutional development and service delivery).

A major focus of NRI’s recent work has been on land reform, which has been identified by successive governments as critical to Papua New Guinea’s development. NRI’s principal researcher for this project has been Papua New Guinean economist Charles Yala, with strong support from Dr Webster. A National Land Summit was convened by Webster, as chair of the Land Summit Coordinating Committee, in 2005 (Yala 2010). Although emphasis was placed on the need to arrive at “a land reform initiative that was truly home-grown,” fittingly, Ron Crocombe was invited back to take part in the summit. Subsequently, a National Land Development Taskforce and a National Land Development Advisory Group, chaired by Webster, were created to oversee reforms.

4 complete list of IASER/NRI publications may be found on the NRI website, www.nri.org.pg.
has been since the 1960s, land reform remains a complex and vexed issue, which continues to challenge researchers and policy makers.

Other recent research projects have included decentralization, local service delivery, and sub-national politics; corruption; electoral reform and political party development; national development and planning; and human immunodeficiency virus / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).5

Since the 1970s, IASER/NRI has had its ups and downs, but it has established a solid reputation for the independence of its research and its capacity, within the limited resources available to it, to respond to demands from government for policy-oriented research and advice. In this, it draws on traditions established in the 1960s, of which Ron Crocombe was a major architect.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Jim Toner, former field manager with NGRU, for his recollections of the early years of NGRU, and to Jim Robin of NRI and Colin Filer of ANU, who helped piece together the history of IASER/NRI. This paper draws on an earlier history of NGRU (May 2006).

REFERENCES


5 NRI 2011 work plan is detailed on the NRI website, <www.nri.org.pg>.


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Participants at the Festschrift Conference, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 12-13 August 2010 (photo: The Rarotongan).