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Political economy of identities in an instance of globalisation: History of a Solomon Islands – Japanese joint venture tuna fishing corporation (1971-2000)

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Abstract

Solomon Taiyo Ltd (STL) is of vital importance to the Solomon Islands economy. It is the second largest employer after the government. It is the only substantial industrial enterprise. It is the only major employer in the Western part of the country. STL is interesting from a social science or humanities point of view because it embodies themes central to contemporary thinking about processes of decolonisation, modernisation, industrialisation, and globalisation. STL is about the adaptation of local practices to accommodate and/or resist new social, political and economic practices. It is an example of an attempt at development through the capital and know-how of a large multinational corporation. It demonstrates some possible consequences of interplay between different peoples and practices through capitalist economic activity. On an empirical level the project aims to provide information about the socio-economic outcomes of this venture and some of the reasons for those outcomes. This paper presents my work-in-progress to date, which includes examination of secondary sources and exploration of theoretical frameworks.

Political economy of identities in an instance of globalisation: History of a Solomon Islands – Japanese joint venture tuna fishing corporation (1971-2000).[1]

On the southwest tip of the island of New Georgia, at the western end of the Vona Vona Lagoon, waters that have flowed shallow and turquoise through the Diamond Narrows suddenly deepen into lapis lazuli. In between the bush and the sea sits the port of Noro, base for the fishing fleet and tuna processing operations of STL. STL is a joint venture between a huge Japanese multinational and a small Pacific island state. It is the only substantial industrial operation in the Solomon Islands, and it is the second largest employer after the government. STL embodies many themes central to contemporary thinking about the aftermath of colonial empires, and about processes of modernisation and development. STL is also about adaptation and resistance by local societies to new political and economic practices.

I first became interested in STL in 1993 when my mother and I were visiting Munda, near Noro, for a diving holiday. I was living in Japan at the time and I was fascinated by the presence of a Japanese company in this place which seemed to me to be so utterly un-Japanese in lifestyle. A long running interest in development studies meant I was aware that both high hopes and dreadful blame are often pinned to investment by multinationals, so I was curious to see what this company was doing in the local economy. A third interest arose later when I was taking a course on globalisation and the politics of identities. During this course I realised that performances of national economies are crucial influences on contemporary national identities. This is particularly the case in relations between a people whose national economy is considered developed and a people whose economy is considered underdeveloped or less developed. I started to think about the many different ways identity and economic activity might interact in a company such as STL.

The paper consists of two sections. I will first briefly introduce the empirical topic of my research - STL Ltd - by giving an overview of the company and its fishing methods. The second section of the paper will explore some of the theoretical frameworks I am developing to analyse the history of STL. These frameworks use relations between identities as a key to understanding the ways in which the company affects people and institutions.

STL Ltd (STL)

Solomon Islands waters abound with a variety of tuna called skipjack or bonito in English, *katsuo* in Japanese, or *makasi* in some Solomon Island languages.[2] It has long been an important source of protein for Solomon Islands coastal communities, and has had religious importance as well. Skipjack sells well as a canned fish in Western markets, and in a dried, shaved form called *katsuobushi* is a staple of Japanese cuisine.

Taiyo Gyogyo was established in the 1880s as a family firm and has evolved into the world's biggest fishing multinational with many subsidiaries and joint venture agreements.[3] By the early 1970s Japanese domestic skipjack fishing companies had become overcapitalised and were looking to expand their operations overseas. The administrators of the then British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) were looking for potential industries to build economic foundations for independence. STL came into existence in 1972.

The STL joint venture agreement was renewed in 1982, and again in 1992. The company began with Taiyo Gyogyo owning 75% and the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) 25%. The workers were Solomon Islanders, the managers Japanese, and the people supervising on boats were specialist skipjack fishermen and essermen from a small port called Sarahama on Irabu Island in Okinawa. The

[1] This paper was prepared while the author was a National Visiting Scholar in the Division of Pacific and Asian History, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra. The paper was first presented as a seminar in the Resource Management in the Asia Pacific seminar series and some additions were made subsequent to comments offered during that seminar, so I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by those participants. My thanks also to Martin Williams, Stephen Gapps and Damian Lucas for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

[2] The scientific name of skipjack is *katsuwonus pelamis.*

[3] The full name of the company is Maruha Taiyo Gyogyo Kabushiki Kaisha. In this paper the company will be referred to as Taiyo.

structure of the company has changed somewhat over the years; for example, SIG now has a controlling shareholding of 51%, the General Manager is a Solomon Islander, and there is a parallel Solomon Islander management structure.

The longevity of STL is curious because only in the last couple of years has the company recorded any profit. Despite the lack of profit there have been good reasons for both partners to stay involved in the joint venture.[4] Some of the benefits for the SIG have been: i) employment,[5] ii) money for rural development through baitfishing royalties,[6] iii) exports to help with the balance of trade,[7] iv) aid spin-offs from having a Japanese fishing corporation working in the area,[8] v) some transfer of know-how and technology, and vi) all the status value of having a long running and relatively successful industrial venture. The more obvious benefits for Taiyo Gyogyo have been: i) fees for technical advice to STL, ii) rent of equipment to STL, iii) interest on loans to STL, iv) long term access to a secure source of skipjack, and v) (until 1992) exclusive rights to market products from the joint venture. As with management structure, the balance of benefits between partners has changed somewhat over the life of the company. For example, since 1992 STL has done much of its own marketing.[9]

In order to make the joint venture benefit the Solomon Islands economy there has been a quota for local employment, and attempts to maximise local value added through processing fish in a cannery and a smoking factory. Until the early 1990s only a small part of the total catch was processed locally, the rest was sold frozen and shipped elsewhere for processing. Canned fish prices are less volatile than frozen fish prices so, as well as providing value added, fish processing guards against some of the vagaries of commodities markets.[10]

STL started life at Tulagi, a small island near Nggela in Central Province. In 1989 the base was moved to new deep water port facilities at Noro, New Georgia. The refurbishing of the port and the canning and smoking factories were funded through Japanese aid agencies, the European Development Fund and the Asian Development Bank.[11]

STL's independence from Taiyo has been somewhat ambiguous. Taiyo employees are generally posted to STL for a few years, then go on to their next Taiyo posting, which means they retain identity as Taiyo employees. Managers of STL (for the first couple of decades the management was almost entirely made up of Taiyo employees) have not had the authority to act independently of the Taiyo head office in Tokyo. So, in terms of managers' employment conditions, and in terms of management structure, the company has not been independent from Taiyo.[12] It could be asserted that it has only been when taking losses or paying bills for services and equipment that STL behaves as an independent company.

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[4] The aims both partners brought to the negotiating table and the results of the first ten years of STL operation are outlined by Sarah K Meltzhoff and Edward S LiPuma (1983) *A Japanese fishing joint venture: worker experience and national development in the Solomon Islands*. International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management, Manila, especially pp 11-12, 14.

[5] According to the 1992 Annual Report of the Central Bank of the Solomon Islands (p 14) STL employed approximately 1700 people.

[6] Baitfish are taken from reefs and lagoons which are owned by local communities so STL pays local communities directly for their baitfishing.

[7] Exports of frozen, canned and smoked fish from STL have been one of the Solomon Islands' major export earners since the company began. Logging has had a higher profile in recent years but fish exports have increased in importance since the Asian currency crisis as the main markets for logs are in Asia, whereas much of the skipjack is sold in European markets. Because the company is majority owned by SIG its products are classified as products of the Solomon Islands and are thus exempt from the tariff applied to canned fish in Europe under the Lome convention.

[8] For details of the connections between Japanese fishing corporations and Japanese aid see Sandra Tarte (1998) *Japan's aid diplomacy and the Pacific Islands*. National Centre for Development Studies, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra (Pacific Policy Papers no. 26) and the Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva.

[9] According to the 1993 Annual Report of the Central Bank of the Solomon Islands (p 11) a new shareholders agreement gave STL rights to market their own products, except for canned fish sold in the UK (about 95% of the canned product) which is still to be marketed by Taiyo on a commission basis.

[10] Canned fish prices only fell 10% in 1992, when frozen fish plunged to US$450 per ton (the lowest in 20 years) from its usual fluctuations around US$800-900 per ton. 1992 Annual Report, Central Bank of the Solomon Islands, p 14.

[11] Sandra Tarte *Japan's aid diplomacy and the Pacific Islands*, op.cit. p 24.

[12] Meltzhoff and LiPuma *A Japanese fishing joint venture*, op.cit. pp 22-23.

STL does not own all of the boats it uses. About half have been chartered from specialist skipjack fishermen and essermen from Okinawa. Even the boats owned by STL are usually captained by Okinawans. The typical crew seems to be about 7 Okinawans to 20 Solomon Islanders. The accountants for STL have traditionally been a third nationality – at first British and now Australian.

Value of exports by commodity (SB$'000)[13]

year	frozen fish	canned fish	smoked fish	total fish
1980	19,757	2,641	781	23,179
1981	19,046	2,573	344	21,963
1982	9,886	2,934	1,147	13,967
1983	24,350	4,589	1,261	30,200
1984	25,088	3,102	610	28,800
1985	27,662	3,566	727	31,955
1986	46,890	4,805	1,233	52,928
1987	44,973	7,114	2,493	54,580
1988	66,496	8,976	2,931	78,403
1989	51,633	9,055	4,605	65,293
1990	31,226	18,403	3,556	53,185
1991	66,989	35,957	2,771	106,417
1992	48,131	36,756	3,063	87,950
1993	28,589	48,050	6,048	82,687
1994	32,583	60,388	6,098	99,069
1995	73,987	65,281	6,443	145,711

Source: 1993 (p 95) and 1995 (p 87) Annual Reports of the Central Bank of the Solomon Islands.

Fishing Methods

The main method employed by STL is pole and line fishing.[14] This is a relatively labour intensive, non-capital intensive form of fishing which is well suited to the Solomon Islands economy. When a school of skipjack is tracked down, baitfish caught from reefs and lagoons are "chummed" overboard and water sprayed on the surface of the water to simulate, and stimulate, a feeding frenzy. Fish are hauled into the boat by hand operated lines with several hooks attached. This method is low in by-catch compared to methods such as the infamous drift net, and it kills fewer dolphins. For this reason pole and line fishing is favoured by green consumers and Taiyo marketing has helped STL cash in on this niche market in the United Kingdom.

The main problem with pole and line fishing in the Solomon Islands is baitfishing. Whereas skipjack catches have been well below the accepted maximum sustainable yield, the amount of baitfish taken from lagoons is widely felt by Solomon Islanders to be unsustainable. Baitfish are caught in lagoons, which is where Islanders fish. Many communities say they feel that there are noticeably less

[13] These figures are for the Solomon Islands as a whole, so they include other skipjack companies as well as STL, but because STL is by far the largest operator the figures accurately reflect the development of STL.

[14] There have been efforts to move into more capital intensive, less labour intensive methods which do not require baitfish, such as purse seining. Purse seine vessels use fish aggregation devices (FADs) which attract tuna to school under it. A FAD may consist of a raft with coconut fronds trailing – this is called a *payao* and is a traditional Filipino fishing tool. Then a net is used to "brail" the fish into the hold of the vessel. Purse seining requires more expensive and technologically complicated boats and provides fewer jobs than pole and line fishing. STL trialled the method in the mid 1980s and found it profitable so have used it to some extent. According to the Annual Report of Central Bank of the Solomon Islands the total catch by all companies in 1991 was 49,500 tons, of which 12,000 was caught by purse seiner and the remainder by pole and line boats. The Solomon Islands Government got on the bandwagon after the trials and ordered a couple of purse seiners but this proved not to be profitable and they were later sold. See *A review by the Auditor General of the purchase and operation of two 500 tonne purse-seine fishing vessels.* Report by the Auditor General of the Solomon Islands, National Parliamentary Paper 1991.

fish now in the lagoons than there were before STL commenced operations. They say they are having to go further afield to find fish, even outside the reefs, which is dangerous in a dugout canoe.[15] Biological research on the likely competition of baitfishing with artisanal fishing concludes, however, that "there is little evidence that the commercial baitfishery in the Solomon Islands has a direct trophic effect on the subsistence reef fishery".[16]

Baitfishing is the point around which negative social impacts of STL are most commonly cited.[17] There are ecological arguments such as those discussed above, but there are also other problems associated with baitfishing. Local communities own the reefs so STL pays royalties to communities for each night baitfish boats operate in their area. This can cause village infighting because, while the money is for the community as a whole, it is often paid through leaders, such as chiefs, and sometimes villagers never see the money. For all of these reasons baitfishing is politically charged and STL has had to cease operations in some areas because of hikes in royalties or because of bans on baitfishing by local owners.

Theoretical frameworks

Neither my empirical nor my theoretical projects fall squarely within any one discipline. The general area of theory to which I aim to contribute may best be described as how social relations are affected by capitalist activity in the presence of factors such as cultural/linguistic/racial/national difference, gender and class difference, modernity, colonisation, power differentials, and so on. This sounds very broad, but as well as focusing on an empirical subject – the company – I am taking a particular theoretical viewpoint of social, economic, political and cultural activity. It is 'identity' and relations between identity groups. Just as one might perform a Marxist analysis of a piece of history, I call what I am doing an identity analysis. What do I mean by 'identity analysis' and why do I think it might be useful? By 'identity' I mean *the constructions of in-group and out-group and the material and symbolic causes and consequences of those distinctions*. Relations between identity groups are important, especially when they become marked by racism, ethno-nationalism, class conflict, gender conflict, etc. Why do some identity relations become so poisoned by chauvinism? How do other identity relations avoid that poison? Contrast the history of relations between Aboriginal and other Australians with the history of relations between English language background Australians and Australians with backgrounds elsewhere in Europe. Within a couple of generations English vs other European language background relations have arrived at a position of relative mutual tolerance. After more than two centuries relations between Aboriginal and other Australians are still rife with violence and inequity. Factors such as status, power and economic opportunity are obvious influences here, but precisely how and under what circumstances do they exert influence?[18]

My project is to thoroughly unpick the links between a set of identity relations and their influencing factors in STL. This will involve mapping and categorizing identity relations, according to both the ways in which identities are constructed and the outcomes of those constructions. For example, what do different people think a 'Solomon Islander' is? Why do they picture 'Solomon

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[15] Problems with baitfishing, including perceived overfishing, have emerged in interviews by the author with Christopher Abe (ex-Finance Minister) and his wife Esther (from the heavily baitfished area of Marovo) 09/06/1997 and Glynn Rence (employee of the Solomon Islands Development Bank, also from Marovo) 20/07/1998.

[16] S. Blaber and J.W. Copland (eds) (1989) *Tuna baitfish in the Indo-Pacific region.* Proceedings of a workshop in Honiara. Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, p 8.

[17] For a discussion of some of the problems of baitfishing in local communities see Edvard Hviding (1996) *Guardians of Marovo Lagoon: practice place and politics in maritime Melanesia*. Pacific Monograph Series 14, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, pp 321-325.

[18] Racism, sexism, class conflict, etc. may each be seen as separate issues but it is also useful to analyse them as examples of a general theme of identity relations. Links between racism (and nationalism and ethnicity), class conflict and sexism are explored by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein in (1991) *Race, nation, class: ambiguous identities*. Verso, London (translation of Balibar by Chris Turner). One of the more notable attempts to deal with problems arising from divisive identity relations has been universalism – which may be characterised as an attempt to downplay differences between groups so that chauvinists may not use those differences as justification for their practices. It is undoubtedly important to remember that there are similarities between people but universalism has proven to be no viable solution to divisive identity relations. A major reason for this is that people like their differences. Moreover, many subordinated and minority groups feel that universalism is akin to assimilation. Balibar and Wallerstein also discuss problems inherent in positing universalism in opposition to particularisms such as racism. See Balibar and Wallerstein *Race, nation, class* (ibid).

Islander' in this way? What effects do these pictures of 'Solomon Islander' have on people's lives? To do this with any clarity I will need to work out which variables are important, and what kinds of data it is feasible to collect. Violence is an important variable, including direct physical violence, symbolic and/or cultural violence. Respect (or denigration) and esteem (or its lack) in ideas of self and other are also important identity relations indicators, as are differentials in power and access to resources. These are diverse types of variables so it will be necessary to look for them in different places, and in different ways. Community meetings, industrial relations negotiations, human resources policies, and public representations of the company are all likely to be fertile sites for gathering data. My methods of data collection will include examination of written records, oral history interviews, and notes of my observations of interactions.[19]

To show how a history of STL fits into the above ideas I will now discuss four types of identity relations – gender, ethnicity, class, and modernity. I will also explore issues of communication that arise generally in identity relations involving STL.

Gender relations

Gender relations have been affected in several ways by STL, one of which is through the employment of women at the Noro cannery. There seems to have been traditional sexual divisions of labour in societies around what is now the Solomon Islands and eastern Papua New Guinea.[20] Early colonial contact and more recent efforts at 'development', however, have accentuated the division. Furthermore, the sexual division of labour has come to be roughly lined up along the division between the cash and non cash economies.[21] For example, the commercialisation of fishing has tended to exclude women.[22] Some women have access to the cash economy through a profession, or through activities such as selling produce, and many men are still involved in the non cash economy, but on the whole men are associated more with the cash economy and women more with the non cash economy. Seeing the cash economy as men's domain has affected women's opportunities to participate in the planning and execution of cash oriented projects.[23]

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[19] My conclusions will be quite specific because I am focusing on one set of identity relations. I considered making my work comparative but that would mean sacrificing depth for breadth and at this stage I think depth is important. Any workable conclusions that arise could later be used as the basis of comparative work. I do not expect to come up with a metatheory that will explain all identity relations in all situations for all time. I do, however, think that we can understand identity relations better than we do at present, and this project is aimed at contributing to that understanding.

[20] Anthropological works on various 'Melanesian' cultures describe fuzzy divisions of labour. That is, both women and men fished and both women and men gardened, although what was fished or gardened, and why, was often divided between the sexes. See, for example, Miriam Kahn (1986) *Always hungry, never greedy: food and the expression of gender in a Melanesian society.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; Edvard Hviding *Guardians of Marovo Lagoon* op.cit. Alternatively, there is sometimes an ideal division of labour which is not evident in practice. The point is made in one feasibility study of a project to promote women's small business in that a strict division of labour exists only in the imaginations of development planners. Women in Development Division, Ministry of Health and Medical Services (1991) *Mere Made Marketing and Training Centre: findings of a feasibility study*. Solomon Islands Government with assistance from the International Labour Organisation, Office for the South Pacific and the Forum Secretariat, Honiara, Solomon Islands, p7.

[21] When wage labour was introduced to the Solomon Islands it was largely something men did outside the village. According to Peter Corris, recruitment of women for work on plantations was less than 10% of total recruitment (1973) *Passage, port and plantation: a history of Solomon Island labour migration 1870-1914.* University of Melbourne Press, Melbourne. Wage labour is sometimes written about as a rite of passage to manhood, see Sarah K Meltzhoff and Edward LiPuma (1986) Hunting for tuna and cash in the Solomons: a rebirth of artisanal fishing in Malaita. *Human Organisation*, 45(1), 53-62, p55. The other main access to cash was through trade with Europeans, and this seems also to have been done mostly by groups of men. See JM McKinnon (1975) Tomahawks, turtles and traders: a reconstruction in the circular causation of warfare in the New Georgia group. *Oceania* XLV(4), 290-307.

[22] The exclusion of women from commercial fisheries is discussed by Penelope Schoeffel (1985) Women in the fisheries of the South Pacific. In RV Cole (ed) *Women in development in the South Pacific: barriers and opportunities.* Development Studies Centre, the Australian National University, Canberra, pp 156-175. See also Eduardo A Loayza and Lucian M Sprague (1992) Developing human resources: recognizing the role of women in fisheries. In *A strategy for fisheries development*. World Bank Discussion Papers Fisheries Series no 135, Washington DC, pp 48-49

[23] In one Malaitan village women were excluded from discussions about village development projects because it was felt women's lack of experience of cash meant they could not offer anything useful in such discussions. Sarah

Until 1989 STL's base was on a small island and workers lived on the base in barracks. Women were not employed because barracks life was seen as unsuitable for women. At Noro the base is not so isolated so most workers can commute daily from their home villages.[24] There was a very high turnover of staff in the cannery because the men did not like the work, so when the Noro facility was opened the company began employing women to work in the cannery.

Ideas about women reflected in employment patterns comprise a combination of local and outside influences. There is a tradition of women factory workers in Japanese industrialisation, and there has arisen an international image of women as workers in global industry. Local ideas about men and outdoor work, women and indoor work, seem also to have played a part. This melange of ideas may be summarised thus: women are good at tedious work, don't mind working inside, are easy to manage, are willing to accept lower wages, and women employee's sexual behaviour is a matter for company management.[25]

There is now a village based female proletariat so the conceptual separation of women from cash work is dissolving.[26] I assume (and will check this during fieldwork) that women's widespread access to a relatively stable income is changing power balances in nearby villages - much as young men's access to cash through labour migration gradually eroded the power of older men in Malaita earlier this century.[27]

Women were first refused and later given jobs in the cannery because of ideas about what women 'are' vis a vis men. These jobs have, in turn, changed what women 'are'. Gender relations are shifting through a dialectical interaction between economic activity and gender identity.

Another dimension of change in gender relations comes about from interactions with fishing boats in villages. Boats often anchor near villages for the night before fishing the next day. Okinawan and Solomon Islander workers on the boats bring fish for the locals and provide a market for fresh fruit and vegetables. The boat workers have money, and alcohol, and they like to party. They sometimes come ashore to drink with local men, or to see local women, or local women might paddle out in canoes to visit the boats. These casual sexual liaisons are often named as the cause of domestic violence and fights between local men and STL employees.[28]

Racial, ethnic, national and regional identities

Loosely speaking, these types of identities are about a shared place of origin, shared ancestry and shared culture. Distinctions between racial, ethnic, national and regional identities are open to interpretation. Nationalism may be a cipher for racism in an era when racial distinction is considered illegitimate.[29] The word 'ethnic' may be applied to identities that could equally be called 'national' in

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K Meltzhoff and Edward LiPuma (1986) Hunting for tuna and cash in the Solomons: a rebirth of artisanal fishing in Malaita. *Human Organisation*, 45(1), 53-62, p 56. Women tended to stay in the village more than men, their lack of travel and contact with other language groups was reflected in the fact that some women did not speak Pijin, whereas virtually all men did. Roger M Keesing (1992) *Custom and confrontation: the Kwaio struggle for cultural autonomy*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p 204.

[24] The demand for women workers exceeds local supply, however, so women from outside the area have come to Noro to work and now live in barracks. The women's barracks (called 'Fence') are inside a tall wire fence which is locked at night, to prevent visits from boyfriends. This sparked an interesting dispute a couple of years ago when the women objected to this protection of their morals by company management.

[25] The best figures comparing wages of men and women I have found thus far are separate figures on women and men at STL from different years. In 1992 the minimum wage for women (and most women are paid the minimum) working in the cannery was 79.4c (Solomon Island dollars) per hour. Mari Sasabe (1993) *Current situation surrounding the female workers of Taiyo cannery in the Solomons*. Report to the Pacific Council of Churches, Fiji. The minimum wage for men in 1983 was SD$1.23 per hour. Meltzhoff and LiPuma (1983) *A Japanese fishing joint venture* op.cit. p 29. Assuming the rate for men has not fallen since 1983 these figures show that women are paid less than men.

[26] A very few women with schooling can become professional if they move away from the village to an urban centre but no non-professional village based women have had access to cash employment.

[27] Roger M Keesing (1992) *Custom and confrontation: the Kwaio struggle for cultural autonomy*. Chicago University Press, Chicago, p 202.

[28] During a stay in Hopongo village on the coast of Rendova Island in September 1994 I heard women's laughter coming from STL catcher boats moored offshore. Contacts between boat workers and village people were explained to me by Glynn Rence from Marovo in an interview 20/07/1998. I hope to get more information on these kinds of informal interactions between villages and the company during fieldwork.

[29] Balibar and Wallerstein *Race nation class* op.cit.

cases where people do not want (or are not allowed to want) the political implications of statehood that go with the nationalism idea, and vice versa.[30] For the purposes of looking at STL, therefore, I treat all these as a single type of identity, which for convenience I will call 'ethnic' identity.

At first glance the obvious ethnic divide in STL is the division between Japanese and Solomon Islanders, but ethnic relations in STL are actually much more complicated. On the Japanese side, there are mainland Japanese Taiyo employees and there are Okinawan fishermen. On the Solomon Island side, regional identities are informed by histories from precontact through to postcolonial times and by cultural and linguistic similarities and differences. This section will mention some issues to do with Japanese-Solomon Island relations then mention issues to do with intra-Japanese and intra-Solomons relations in STL.

Relations between Solomon Islanders and Japanese people have been affected by various historical and cultural factors, including World War II. Cultural influences include stereotypes of 'Asians' and 'Pacific Islanders' that reflect and reproduce a mishmash of popular culture images spawned by the work of people as diverse as Margaret Mead and Jackie Chan.[31] STL has had a great impact on the way 'the Japanese' are perceived by those who live in the Solomon Islands, locals and non-Japanese expatriates. Global ideas about Japanese businessmen and the ethics of Japanese companies merge with local stories of STL and the resulting image is rarely complimentary. It is interesting to note that when people speak of 'the Japanese' they often then qualify the identity they portray by distinguishing 'Okinawans' from other 'Japanese'. This is because the impressions given by the Taiyo managers and the Okinawan crew leaders are very different.

Until the 1870s Okinawa was an independent country whose leaders cultivated connections with Chinese rulers as well as Japanese. From then on, apart from a couple of decades of United States administration after World War II, Okinawa has been part of Japanese territory. There are linguistic and cultural differences between Okinawans and mainland Japanese; the latter have tended to treat the former as inferior. Okinawans were sent as labourers to various places in the pre-war Japanese empire, including Micronesia. Here they had an ambiguous position and became known as 'Japan Kanakas' because of their obvious poverty and subordinated position in relation to mainland Japanese.[32]
The Okinawans who work for Taiyo are actually from one remote part of Okinawa, Sarahama Port on Irabu Island (one of the Miyako group) which is 300km south of the main Okinawan island, very close to Taiwan. Miyako Islanders have traditionally been considered inferior by other Okinawans and their dialect is again different to standard Okinawan. These remote southern islands (the Miyako and Yaeyama groups) were so much *not* a part of Japan that at one stage in the late 19th century they were offered to China in a deal (which fell through).

Perceived difference between Okinawan crews and the Taiyo managers is not simply one of ethnic or regional difference within Japan, however. Class differences are also at play here. Fisheries managers are university educated middle class people. Fishing crew are high school educated working class people. In any society such groups are likely to be seen as different (although I do not deny the existence of culturally specific differences between Japanese fisheries managers and Okinawan fishing crews compared to those of other countries). Class *habitus* as well as ethnic *habitus* are involved in the way Okinawans and mainlanders perceive each other, and the way others perceive both groups.

Taiyo managers have very little to do with Solomons villagers but Okinawan boat workers have extensive dealings with villagers through baitfishing, and the social (sometimes sexual) contact when boats are moored for rest periods. Okinawan crew seem to indulge in the same breaking of village sexual taboos as their Solomon Island colleagues but the way this is perceived by villagers can vary in interesting ways.[33] Hviding asserts that Marovo people tend not to hold Okinawan crew

[30] The idea that ethnicity is national identity delinked from some of nationalism's political implications is being explored by Gavin Mount in his forthcoming PhD thesis from the International Relations Department in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University.

[31] The reference to Margaret Mead is a somewhat flippant allusion to constructions of the Pacific (particularly Pacific women) as a place of free love. Mead and other Western anthropologists' work have been translated into Japanese but there is also a Japanese anthropological tradition of constructing images of Pacific peoples (and by implication Japanese people) as part of an imperial project. See, for example, Tomiyama Ichiro (1995) Colonialism and the sciences of the tropical zone: the academic analysis of difference in 'the island peoples'. *Positions* (3)2, 367-391. The influence of Hong Kong martial arts movies on Solomon Island ideas about 'Asians' is mentioned by Meltzhoff and LiPuma (1983) *A Japanese fishing joint venture* op.cit. p 25.

[32] Tomiyama Ichirô, Colonialism and the sciences of the tropical zone, op.cit.

[33] That Okinawan and Solomon Island crew both violate sexual taboos in villages while working for STL has been mentioned by several people from affected villages, including Glynn Rence from Marovo (interview with author 20/07/1998).

members responsible for their actions because Okinawans are thought to be "like children"; they are "wild" and therefore cannot be expected to behave in a civilised manner.[34] Similar transgressions by Solomon Islanders, on the other hand, are often met with violence. Here ethnic relations are intersecting with gender relations.

There are complicated ethnic differences and regional rivalries between Solomon Islanders. Prior to the colonial period the various Solomon Islands societies were very insular. Contact between various clan groups or between groups from the sea and bush was either through violent raids or trading situations, which were also often fraught with violence. People could certainly not travel freely through the land of other groups and around the turn of the century some returning labour migrants were killed by locals when dropped off in the wrong areas.

There are reciprocal rights and obligations within communities which do not extend beyond the community - whether that community is the clan, the village, or one's *wantok*[35] network. For example, Glynn Rence from the Marovo area believes the fact that workers on the boats are from other parts of the Solomons means they have no sense of responsibility to the village near where they anchor. He says their lack of local ties enables them to feel free to violate sexual taboos and generally cause trouble.[36]

The land where the Noro base is situated embodies some intra-Solomons ethnic relations. That part of New Georgia traditionally belongs to the Kazukuru people, a group who have been culturally subsumed by the nearby Roviana people. Presumably the Kazukuru have some claim to customary ownership of the land. At this stage of my research it is unclear whether there are links between the disappearance of Kazukuru culture and the placement of the STL base to be at Noro. As of 1995, however, the title for the land of the Noro port was still not secured by the Ports Authority.[37]

Outside the village, and in situations of wage labour, the *wantok* system is an important site for intra-Solomons group identities. In STL *wantok* employees like to share food and live together, and unemployed *wantok*s often come to stay with employees. STL (Taiyo) managers have seen the *wantok* system as a threat to the company because they feel it competes with worker loyalty. They fear that workers might take rations or stores from the company to give to their *wantok*s. *Wantok* relations play an important role in STL, not least because management policy regarding these relations has lead to antagonised relations between Solomon Islanders and Japanese, and between *wantok* groups.[38]

There are long-running provincial rivalries in the Solomon Islands, notably that between Malaita and Western Province. During colonial times the British administration exploited these differences, particularly in the deployment of police. Gideon Zoleveke, from Choiseul in the Western Province, was disturbed to note that most of the police in Malaita were from Choiseul.[39] He also noted that the Malaitans were not as violent as he had been brought up to think of them. People from Western Province often take the position that Malaitans dominate the national government. On occasions this rivalry becomes very heated and results in the Western Province threatening to boycott national events, such as independence celebrations in 1978 and again at the 20th anniversary of independence in 1998.

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[34] Edvard Hviding *Guardians of Marovo Lagoon* op.cit. p 324.

[35] *Wantok* is a Pijin word meaning literally 'one language', so can refer to linguistic groups but is also used to refer to extended family and other kinds of identity links. Functionally, a *wantok* is someone one has a relationship of reciprocal obligation with, as opposed to strangers.

[36] Interview with author 20/07/1998.

[37] Solomon Islands Ports Authority 1995 Annual Report, p 5.

[38] The role of the *wantok* system in STL is detailed by Meltzhoff and LiPuma *A Japanese fishing joint venture* op.cit. pp 38-40. One manager put a high wire fence around the base to prevent non employees from gaining entry, which was apparently very bad for morale. Theft and fights between non *wantok* employees forced to live together were seen as unlikely to have happened if *wantoks* had been allowed to cohabit.

[39] Two autobiographies note the use of Choiseul police in Malaita. Gideon A.P. Zoleveke (edited by John Chick) (1980) *Zoleveke: a man from Choiseul*. Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Honiara, p 45; Jonathon Fifi'i (autobiography edited by Keesing, Roger M) (1989) *From pig theft to parliament: my life between two worlds*. Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and the University of the South Pacific, Honiara, p 83. People from the Western Province tend to represent Malaitans as violent and uneducated. People from the Western Province have been thought of as being closer to European culture (as embodied in Christianity and schooling) than other Solomons peoples.

Class

Capitalist class identities are a relatively new phenomena in the Solomon Islands and they tend to intersect a great deal with ethnic relations. When STL the Solomon Islanders involved were labourers. As the company has evolved, however, class relations within the Solomon Islander contingent has become more complicated, particularly now that there is a parallel management structure. There are also Solomon Islander politician and bureaucrat elites involved with the company. As mentioned before, relations between mainland Taiyo managers and Okinawan crews are class as well as ethnic relations because mainland Japanese Taiyo Gyogyo employees are university educated managers, while Okinawan fishermen are high school educated fishermen. The type of labour women do in the cannery and their wage levels show that gender relations are in a sense also class relations.

From the colonial period there has been a long history of enterprise being owned and managed by foreigners. The pattern of wage labour in the past may have set up certain expectations that businesses be run by foreigners and labour be done by Solomon Islanders. Many Solomon Islanders call both STL and the canned fish product 'Taiyo' because they do not know their own government is the majority shareholder; they believe the company is Japanese owned.[40] Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka talks of the mantle of 'boss' from colonial relations being assumed by 'Asians'.[41] Taiyo managers and Solomon Islanders' *habitus*, as reflected in their sense of self and other, acts to reproduce particular kinds of class formations. Managers have seen themselves, been seen by Solomon Islanders and white expatriates as 'Japanese'. They are not simply Japanese as a personal thing, managerial Japaneseness is part of what legitimates their position as managers.

Modernity as an identity

'Modernity' is not commonly considered to be an identity. People involved in STL do, however, often position themselves or their group as in some sense modern and the other(s) as not, although the word 'modern' is not always used.[42] In some cases the identity being claimed is 'developed', or being part of a group able to operate successfully in the cash economy. Identity relations based on perceived modernity or its lack affect relations between Japanese and Solomon Islanders, as well as relations between groups of Solomon Islanders, and between men and women.

Relations between Solomon Islanders and Japanese are overlaid with the usually unspoken identity of modernity. It is related to interstate relations whereby Japan is an aid donor and the Solomon Islands a recipient.[43] Stereotypes of island cultures being unsuitable for capitalist enterprise persist all over the Pacific and are held by Solomon Islanders and Europeans as well as Japanese people.[44] In STL this stereotype is manifest in ideas about the kind of workers Solomon Islanders make, and their position regarding the company vis a vis the village.

In the Solomon Islands 'the village' has become a metonym for not-modern. The village stands for traditional lifestyles and the non-cash economy. STL managers see that workers are more committed to the village than to the company and are thus transient employees. This is often explained as a feature of Solomon Islands culture and is used as a reason not to improve working conditions or possibilities for promotion and training. It is possible that an ambivalent attitude to regular wage labour is rooted in traditional culture, but it is also caused by company policies. Wage labour in the Solomons

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[40] Edvard Hviding *Guardians of Marovo Lagoon* op.cit. p 322.

[41] Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka (n.d.) *I am not a stupid native! Decolonising images and imagination in the Solomon Islands*. Unpublished paper, Political and Social Change Department, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.

[42] Meltzhoff and LiPuma say Solomon Islanders word their ambivalence about working for STL as a dilemma between choosing "custom or civilisation". Meltzhoff and LiPuma (1983) *A Japanese fishing joint venture* op.cit. p 56.

[43] Japanese aid money for infrastructure development has gone to the port facilities at Noro and the new national airport. For a detailed analysis of Japanese aid and the extent to which it is tied to the activities of Japanese multinationals see Sandra Tarte *Japan's aid diplomacy and the Pacific Islands* op.cit.

[44] The theme of Micronesian cultures being unsuitable for economic development permeates the American administration as presented by David Hanlon (1998) *Remaking Micronesia: discourses over development, 1944-1982*. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu. In several places Hanlon asserts that the term 'underdeveloped' became a pejorative term like 'primitive', 'backward', or 'savage'. He says that just as Europe constructed itself in opposition to the Orient it defined, rich countries define themselves as developed against a 'Third World' they define. Teleological modernisation theories have underpinned the identity of modernity.

for the last century has involved working and living conditions that people do not want to submit themselves to for long periods, and wages are too low to support families.[45] STL has continued this tradition.[46]

Relations between Solomon Islander STL employees and villagers are also infused with identity as modern or not, and it seems to cause some problems. Employees who come home on holiday or after several years' work with some cash in their pocket have a reputation of disparaging the village as backward and of not 'fitting in' for some time.[47] Many women prefer to feed their families processed and canned food when they can afford it, because it is considered to be more modern.[48]

Communication in identity relations

Communication constantly arises as an issue in STL, both in terms of language but also in terms of the politics and cultures of communication. These anecdotes encapsulate some of these aspects of communication that go beyond the existence of mutually intelligible language:

> A Pijin word for Japanese people is 'ear pas' which means blocked ears. The Solomon Islanders who have defined this word for me say it goes beyond linguistic incomprehension, it is as if Japanese people are incapable of understanding, even when words they know are used.[49]

> The then Finance Minister Christopher Abe conducted the last joint venture negotiations at Taiyo head office in Tokyo in 1992. He says he knows the Taiyo Gyogyo head speaks enough English to have been able to communicate directly, but that he chose to use an interpreter instead. Mr Abe said he felt that the choice to use an interpreter was a deliberate and strategic distancing manoeuvre.[50]

The languages one is taught as a child, the languages one chooses to learn as an adult, and the languages one chooses to use in particular situations all reveal aspects of identity relations. Who speaks whose language is identity politics. When expatriate English speakers who live in the Solomons choose not to learn Pijin, or denigrate it as bastardised English, this is strongly resented by some Solomon Islanders.[51] Language naturally corresponds with ethnicity, but it also corresponds with class in interesting ways. For Solomon Islanders and Japanese the capacity to speak English is related to the kind of education received. Most Okinawan fishermen have not learned Solomon Pijin, in part because their schooling has not given them the English skills to be able to pick Pijin up easily.[52] On the other hand it is no easier for Solomon Islanders to learn to speak something the Okinawans can understand. An Okinawan Pijin has developed for working on the boats, and some longer term employees have even picked up some of the Sarahama dialect.

Most Solomon Islanders have at least a couple of local languages and Pijin at their disposal, some also have English. English, Pijin and local languages all have particular political and social connotations. English was the language of the old colonial regime. It has international and political connotations as well as indicating a certain level of education. Pijin, on the other hand, although

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[45] Tomiyama Ichirô discusses the use made of anthropological descriptions of people by imperial Japanese forces in pre World War II Micronesia. He characterises the problem as one of asking "what are they?" when the question that should have been asked is "what do we do to them?" Colonialism and the sciences of the tropical zone, op.cit.

[46] STL management ideas about workers are included in Meltzhoff and LiPuma *A Japanese fishing joint venture*, op.cit. especially pp 26-40. Competition between the company and the village is discussed on p 31, housing problems on p 32, the boring lifestyle of workers living on the base on p 33.

[47] Glynn Rence (interview 20/07/1998) says that when STL workers return to their own village they seem to have a diminished sense of responsibility for the community. He says this is manifest in not helping relatives build houses, not giving part of their wages to village projects, etc.

[48] Women in Development Division, *Mere Made*, op.cit. p 9. According to Joseph Tasker (personal communication, December 1994) this extends to preferring powdered cows' milk (not infant formula) to breast milk for feeding infants.

[49] Interview with Christopher Abe 09/06/1997 and Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka 11/08/1997.

[50] Interview with Christopher Abe 09/06/1997.

[51] See, for example, Jonathon Fifi'i, *From pig theft to parliament*, op.cit. p 147.

[52] The lack of common language has been a safety hazard on catcher boats. See Meltzhoff and LiPuma *A Japanese fishing joint venture* op.cit. p 33.

developed from colonial wage labour and trading with Europeans, is very much owned by the Solomon Island people. Because Pijin is a Solomons language developed for speaking to Europeans and people from other language groups in wage labour situations it is a language with overtones of national solidarity and working class roots. Pijin has a sense of urban savvy. Local languages are traditional and for most people (except people raised in Honiara who might speak Pijin as a first language) their local language would be the 'normal' one. When Solomon Islanders have the choice of a local language, Pijin and English they may switch between languages according to subject matter. For example, men drinking and chatting in the bar in Munda might use English with each other when they are discussing something overtly political; in this case the English language acts as a 'soapbox'. It may be interesting to analyse language use in STL in light of the work of various theorists of nationalism and language, such as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner.[53]

Conclusion

I will conclude by taking us back to New Georgia, to the Munda Bar at Agnes Lodge. The bar has a timber floor and high thatched roof and is a watering hole for tourists, travelling officials and locals alike. The low walls frame large views of the island-studded Roviana Lagoon, the waters of which lap the shore not ten metres from the bar. Some evenings entertainment is provided by a 'bamboo band' consisting of a very large bamboo panpipe laid on the floor and sounded by someone thwacking the open ends of the pipes with a coconut husk or rubber sandal. A choral group sits on top of the pipes. Arm-in-arm dancers jiggle and shuffle around the bamboo band. On one such evening the Taiyo managers were entertaining a group of buyers from Sainsbury's.[54] Both groups of men drank copious amounts of beer and, as is usual for the audience of a bamboo band, they periodically joined in with the dancing. Their jiggling and shuffling with local women, however, was perceived by some members of the audience as being more 'sleazy' than usual.

Scenes such as this are where identities are performed. Who is getting what here, and how? What ideas about self and other are implied in people's behaviour? What images of 'Japanese', 'Solomon Islanders', 'English', 'managers', 'women', and 'men' are being reproduced or changed in this social interaction?

[53] Benedict Anderson (1991) (revised and extended edition) *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso, London. Ernest Gellner (1983) *Nations and nationalism.* Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

[54] The description of this particular evening was provided by Christine Weir.

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